



He took two strides and swept the white curtain on one
side" (Chapter xxv)

Money or Wife?]

[Frontispiece

MONEY OR WIFE?

BY

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MONEY OR WIFE?

CHAPTER I.

JULIAN BRYANT drove to the city in a taxi-cab. He knew that it was a luxury, but it was so difficult for him to sever himself immediately from the delightful associations of the last few weeks.

His imagination was still alive with pictures of the varied scenes through which he had passed, his mind still under the influence of new and enchanting experiences. Even now, as he sat back in the busy little taxi, which was speeding him through the clatter and confusion of the London streets, and he closed his eyes, he could imagine himself in Venice once again : Venice at night, Venice under the soft glory of a May moon !

He could feel the clasp of Enid's little hand in his as they had sat close together, while their gondola had been carried away from the moonlight and the glitter and the movement of the Grand Canal, away from the voices of the singers whose barge was nightly moored in front of the Doge's Palace, away from all that was real to those silent pathways that meandered in and out of the stately dark palaces, so

silent, so mysterious, so full of that dignity which was so indubitably their peculiar heritage.

In the quiet night hours, Venice, the real Venice, rises superbly above the despoiling hand of modernism; the magazines of antiquity, the glass works, the noisy, useful steamboats, all the commercial elements of the new Venice, are shrouded and silenced, only the music of the lapping water on the walls, and only the melancholy, the beautiful sense of age and mystery, remain—a world set apart from everyday things, a world of dreams!

Julian Bryant was back in that world of dreams now!

He opened his eyes and closed them again, to dream on.

They were away from the shadows now, swiftly crossing from under the Ponte dei Sospiri to the Giudecca, where the big English yacht had been anchored for so many weeks; past the flotilla of Dalmatian fishing-boats, with their curiously decorated sails and the "eye of God" set in the prow of each—on and on in the brilliant moonlight till the singing and the lights had faded out, and only the lagune stretched before them opalescent with shimmering phosphorus reaching into the far distance till it touched the sea beyond; the restless, the incomparable Adriatic.

The man in the cab moved and caught his breath.

He could actually feel the soft breezes stirring the pink and purple wistaria on the high wall that bordered the lagune; he could see the jewelled radiance dancing like fireflies even about the blade of Giuseppe's oar as it moved gently in and out of the water . . . and then he opened his eyes with a jerk. . . . Venice, city of romance, of tragedy, of love, of poetry, Venice had vanished . . . this was

real life, the heart of the great, the ugly, working world !

Just for an instant he puckered his brows as he alighted, and a shadow fell on the unconscious happiness of his face. Then as the early summer sunshine fell on him and the summer air stirred his pulses, he smiled.

Venice lay behind, but Enid was with him always. Enid and love. He tipped his cabman liberally and slipped a coin into the hand of the lift man who took him up to the office.

" Been doing yourself well, Mr. Bryant, from the look of you ? Ah ! a holiday's a great thing, isn't it ? "

And Bryant laughed.

" Yes, a holiday is a great thing."

The lift man looked after him with a nod as he passed rapidly down the passage.

" Might have been on his honeymoon," he said to himself.

There was something certainly bright and attractive about Julian Bryant. Everybody seemed pleased to see him ; he brought a new element into the office ; his happiness was imparted unconsciously to his fellow-workers, and as he sat down in his accustomed place and started on his accustomed work, he stopped every now and then to sniff the white rose in his button-hole, the rose which his wife had pinned in when they had parted.

Just about half an hour before lunch time, one of his clerks came to him with a message.

" You're wanted, Bryant ; the ' head ' has asked for you."

Julian Bryant put down his pen and walked through the long office till he reached the door at the farther end.

He stopped on his way to shake hands with two

of the girl typists, all ignorant that one of them cherished a secret and ardent admiration for him. The fact was hardly to be wondered at, for the young man was very good to look at. He had been in a Hussar regiment for nearly seven years before he had taken to city work, and his military education was clearly discernible in the fine way with which he held himself, and in his smart, well-groomed look. As he passed through the door he entered a little ante-room, and from the room beyond there came out a middle-aged man, with his hands full of papers.

"Ah! Mr. Bryant, there you are. I was just coming to fetch you. Will you please go in?"

He stood on one side and closed the door as Bryant passed into the other room. Here was seated the head of the firm which employed Julian Bryant. The "head" was a woman. A thin, tall, dark woman, with an unmistakable Jewish look in her features, and in the quick yet furtive expression of her eyes.

She was rather extravagantly dressed, and wore a great deal of jewellery. The pearls round her throat were supposed to be matchless, and Julian had often heard it said in the office that "the chief" carried about on her person something like thirty thousand pounds when she wore these pearls. The matter did not interest him, however; he was far more attracted by the extraordinary brain-power of this woman, by the strength of her will, by her shrewdness and her wit.

She turned as the young man came in, and stretched out both her hands in greeting to him.

"Ah!" she said, "it's good to see you, Julian. You seem to have been away a long time."

Julian Bryant pressed the two hands, and his face flushed. This welcome was a surprise to him, for as a rule Mrs. Marnock had few words to spare

and was curtness itself in her manner. She had no time for graciousness of bearing ; her motto was to get the most out of everybody who worked for her, and the best of everybody with whom she did business.

" Sit down," she said, " and tell me what you've been doing. You look another man."

" Oh ! I'm awfully fit, thanks to you," Bryant answered brightly. " Mrs. Marnock, it was really too good of you to give me six weeks' holiday instead of a month."

The woman at the desk smiled, and when she smiled one saw how old she was ; one saw, too, as the clear sunshine streamed upon her, how pathetic were her efforts to induce the belief that she possessed even a remnant of youth.

" You did not write," she said, and her voice was soft.

Julian Bryant coloured. He was leaning on the chair with both hands, but he did not sit down. Her remark surprised him.

" Oh ! I don't think—I mean—I hardly liked to do that."

" That was foolish of you," said Mrs. Marnock. " You know I am interested in you. Besides, though you work for me, remember we are connected."

The young man laughed.

" Honestly, I have never remembered that. You are such a big person, you know ; it would have seemed almost presumptuous to have done so," he said ; " and yet," he added the next moment, " it was of course naturally your marriage with my mother's stepbrother that gave me my chance here."

" Yes," said Mrs. Marnock, " it was that in the beginning ; but you have yourself to thank, Julian, for all the rest. When first I heard of you, and my

late husband asked me to give you a chance here, I must confess I was a little prejudiced against you. I said to myself, 'A boy who has been in a smart cavalry regiment will be the last sort of person to be worth his salt in this office.' The moment I saw you, however, I knew that I had made a mistake. I'm pretty good at reading characters, and I knew there was stuff in you. That's why I took you on, and why I mean to give you all the chance I can."

Once again the colour flashed into the young man's face.

"I don't know how to thank you," he said. "I'll have to let you realise my gratitude by facts and by degrees."

Mrs. Marnock smiled at him.

"I sent for you now to tell you I am going to make some changes here. You know that Hodson is leaving? Yes, he is going abroad. Well, I propose that you should take his place."

"Hodson's work!" Bryant echoed quickly. "That—that is a big step up!"

His heart was beating wildly. It is true that he had not as yet set himself to sort out and arrange and calculate how Enid and he were going to live on the very little income which he earned; but at the back of his mind there had lurked the uncomfortable conviction that it was not going to be a very easy matter. And now in the most wonderful, most unexpected way, he was nominated to a post that would mean certainly four times the value of what he had been earning hitherto. He stood so long in silence that the woman at the desk laughed.

"Well," she asked, "do I understand that you will accept this new office?"

He looked at her for an instant.

"Accept?" he said. "Oh! you know I will! The only thing is, am I quite up to the work? Hodson

has been with you so long ; he is such a smart chap. Of course, I'd do my utmost to——”

Mrs. Marnock interrupted him.

“ I have taken your measure ; I know what you can do, that's quite sufficient,” she said in her curt way. “ You will start your new duties next week. If there is anything you don't feel quite sure about, come to me. Don't go to the others. Come to me.” Her sallow face had a tinge of colour. “ I am very ambitious for you, Julian. This is only a beginning.”

The young man stammered. He felt it well-nigh impossible to express his gratitude. Her kindness, her belief in him meant so much, so very much !

“ I wish I could thank you,” he said ; “ but I can't, honestly I can't.”

“ I don't want thanks,” said Mrs. Marnock. “ I know I can trust you. You will have to see me very frequently at the beginning ; in fact, there is a good deal that I ought to talk over with you at once. Dine with me to-night.”

Julian Bryant bit his lip.

“ Oh ! I'm so very sorry,” he said. “ I'm afraid I can't dine to-night.”

“ You are already engaged ? ”

He laughed a little shyly.

“ Yes.” He paused an instant, and then he said : “ My wife expects me.”

Mrs. Marnock sat very still, and there was silence for a moment, then she repeated :

“ Your wife ? You are married—when ? ”

She spoke jerkily—harshly.

“ I married the first day of my holiday. We have been spending our honeymoon abroad.”

Again the woman was silent, and then she queried :

“ Whom have you married ? ”

“ My wife is a Canadian—that is to say.” Bryant

added eagerly, "she really is English, but she has lived the last few years of her life with an aunt in Canada; her parents are dead. She came over to study music here. She plays most beautifully."

"And she has money?" queried Mrs. Marnock, her voice dry and hard.

He laughed.

"Oh, no, not a farthing! Some lady in Toronto interested herself in Enid and sent her over to England to study. We met for the first time this winter. We were staying in the same boarding-house."

Mrs. Marnock was tracing some lines on the blotting-paper with a pen. Her hand trembled—that long, thin, brown-skinned hand overburdened with rings.

"Why did you not tell me?" she asked suddenly.

He looked surprised.

"I did not think about it. Of course, my mother knows."

"Your mother!" Mrs. Marnock repeated the words almost contemptuously. "And naturally your mother would approve of such supreme folly!"

"Folly!" The young man repeated the word with a little note of quick anger in his voice.

Mrs. Marnock threw down the pen.

"Yes, folly. What are you? Twenty-six or seven? Well, whatever you are, you are a boy just beginning to crawl in business, assuredly not able to hold yourself upright, much less to support another person. Why didn't you come and tell me what you had in your mind? Why didn't you come to me and ask my advice?"

He answered her straightforwardly.

"I don't think I wanted advice. I wanted happiness.

The woman laughed a mirthless laugh.

"And you suppose you can buy your happiness in this way? Well, you are not the first fool who

has dreamed such a dream." Her tone changed. "I am disappointed in you," she said harshly. "I had certain ambitions for you. As I told you just now, I believe you had stuff in you to achieve big things, but to get them you must be independent ; you want to stand alone. In God's name, Julian, why did you do this thing ? "

Julian Bryant answered her proudly.

"Because I love my wife with all my heart ; and because she loves me as I love her."

And Mrs. Marnock answered him with a shrill laugh.

"I understand," she said. She got up slowly from her chair, and moved about the room. There was a strained silence for a moment, a silence which she broke. "So," she said, with a sneer in her voice—"so for the second time you have sacrificed your life for a woman ! In the beginning it was your mother who destroyed your career, forced you to leave the army when your father died, and landed you with responsibilities that robbed you of all you had. When she married and took herself out of your hands I thought I saw the way clear for you, and now you have taken on another woman—a wife." She turned and looked at him with her sharp, accusative eyes. "My friend, you were lucky enough to lose your mother ; I am afraid a wife will be less easily disposed of."

The young man shut his lips firmly. Angry words, words he knew that he would regret after they had been spoken, trembled on those lips. He turned towards the door.

"I am sorry I have disappointed you," he said, and with that he would have passed out, but Mrs. Marnock stopped him.

"I must give you a wedding present. Don't leave till you hear from me this afternoon."

Bryant went out and tried to eat some lunch, but his interview with the woman whom he served had taken away his appetite. He felt uneasy, depressed, almost unhappy. When he went back to his work this feeling lingered. He was longing to be away from the office, longing to rejoin his wife. It was the first time they had been separated for so many hours.

One by one the other clerks finished their work and went, but he stayed on, waiting, and at last Mrs. Marnock's secretary came to him bearing a letter.

There was a curious look on the man's face as he handed this letter to Bryant. He paused an instant as though he would have spoken, and then, with a little shrug of his shoulders, he walked away.

Julian Bryant slipped the letter into an inside pocket of his coat, and then made his way quickly out of the office. Although Mrs. Marnock had spoken of a wedding present, he had a presentiment this letter would give him very little pleasure. He was, however, wholly unprepared for the contents of it. Not until he was well away from the office did he open it. Inside he found a cheque for £250 and a short letter.

"An hour or so ago," wrote Mrs. Marnock, "I told you that I had great ambitions for you. By your own folly you have destroyed these ambitions. You have not only done a very bad thing for yourself, but you have deceived me, as I can no longer trust you, and as your marriage alienates entirely all my sympathy, and the interest I have felt in your career, it will be futile for you to remain on in this office. I therefore write to tell you that I shall have no further use for your services; and I enclose you one year's salary."

Just for a little while the young man felt dazed;

then the harshness, the cruelty of this treatment, awakened his anger. Hardly conscious of where he was going, he walked on, telling himself passionately that he would immediately return this ill-omened wedding gift. Phrase after phrase flashed into the young man's mind of the letter he would write when he returned this cheque ; but, after a while, there came a change in the current of his thoughts. Anger gave way to the inevitable reaction, and with it there came an uncomfortably clear perception of what lay immediately in front of him.

The expenses of his marriage and his honeymoon had exhausted what little money he had in the bank. There remained indeed barely enough to pay his bill at the modest hotel where for the moment he and his wife were staying. If he sent back this £250, what could he do ? Had he been absolutely alone the position would have been so different, besides, the money was justly his ; he had been turned away, cut off from his only means of existence ; hateful though it was to feel that he was obliged to use this money, he dared not act on impulse.

“ After all, I shall get some sort of work,” he told himself. But there stole over his heart even as he said this to himself, a cold, dull feeling. It would not be his first experience of trying to get employment. He knew now that he had been extraordinarily lucky to have been given an opening in the firm of Marnock & Marnock. Influence had helped him to this position ; there was nothing of the sort available now. He had planned to get back to Enid as quickly as possible ; but he let 'bus after 'bus pass him ; he wanted to be calm, he wanted to have driven trouble out of his eyes before he met his wife.

That morning they had sighed as they had kissed and parted for a few hours.

“ Horrid, horrid work ! ” Enid had said ; and

Julian had repeated the words ; and now the " horrid work " was taken from him !

Julian Bryant trembled a little as he faced the full significance of this !

CHAPTER II.

JULIAN BRYANT'S wife was extremely attractive. There were some people who did not consider her pretty ; but, on the other hand, there were some who actually declared that she was beautiful.

Bryant had fallen in love with her voice and her laughter before he had realised in the least what she was like ; in fact, he had been many weeks in the same house before he even saw her, but during that time he had grown into the trick of waiting to hear her speak. She had to pass the door of his room to go to her own little apartment at the top of the house, and he always left his door ajar when he knew she was expected, so that he might hear her coming. Usually she used to hum or sing softly to herself as she mounted the very steep stairs. She was like a rare ray of sunshine in the shabby, depressing atmosphere of the boarding-house, something that lifted and strengthened the young man's spirit, for life was none too easy for him. He never knew, indeed,

until he found himself installed as a boarder in the big, shabby Bloomsbury establishment, how much he needed beautiful things about him, nor how hard it was for him to assimilate himself to the restrictions and the hardships of a city clerk's existence.

He still retained a smartness in his look and wore well-cut clothes, and he was the object of a good deal of admiration from the female visitors; but he got out of the boarding-house as frequently as possible. He loathed the food, and detested the people, and he was only happy when he was by himself.

Julian was generous by nature; he had been devoted to his mother, and had counted it little cost to leave the army and to turn round and face a life of drudgery for that mother's sake; but it was impossible, even for one so kind and affectionate, not to feel at times the futility of the sacrifice he had made.

Certainly he had reduced the burden of debts, till very little remained; but his mother had quickly shown him of what quality she was made. Her grief for his father had been overwhelming at first, so much so that it had been a shock beyond description to the young man when one day he had a little letter from his mother calmly informing him that she was married again.

Of course, she had an excuse for such conduct, insisting that this action of hers had been brought about because she did not wish to remain a burden on her boy; but she prudently escaped all uncomfortable scenes by removing herself to a considerable distance. She had married a man her inferior in position, but apparently possessed of a good deal of money.

"We shall live abroad," she had written. "I do

hope, darling, that you will write to me as often as you can ! ”

His mother’s marriage signified something more than a shock to Julian Bryant—it left him quite alone. His relations had been estranged at the time of his father’s death ; as a matter of fact, they had kept carefully aloof, not wishing to be involved in the pecuniary difficulties ; the only one who had shown him practical kindness had been Mrs. Marnock, who had married an elderly half-brother of his mother’s, a man who would have been very kind to Julian had he been alive at this time. The late Mr. Marnock had been a great sufferer, and had never been at the office, but he had roused his wife’s interest in Julian, and the young man had been very grateful to her for giving him a start.

It was so inevitable that he and Enid should drift into happy comradeship. They met one very wet evening when Julian, feeling not only a disinclination to face the rain, but conscious of a certain foolishness of spending money for food outside when he could obtain it in the house, had decided to remain at home.

He had gone down to dinner late, resolving to retire to his own room again almost immediately ; but his plans had been altered. Some one else was late, too, and as he had entered the dining-room, the clear, fresh, enchanting voice with the sunny little ring in it which was so fascinating to him came to his ears.

The dinner was cold and not very appetising ; but they sat and shared it together ; and they talked and they made friends. The girl told him that she was quite alone.

“ I came over to England,” she said, “ against the wish of my aunt ; in fact, she was very angry, and prophesied all sorts of dreadful things that were to

happen to me ; but I don't mean to be a failure I mean to do well, and to make a place for myself over here."

And it was not very long before Julian confessed to himself that the place she intended to make was already found in his heart, in his very heart of hearts. He loved her as he had not known it was possible that any one human creature could love another.

Back in the old days, when he had been with his regiment, he had flirted, and danced, and paid court as the others had done ; but his heart had never been touched ; and now it yielded itself in one great yearning tenderness and passion for this lonely girl, with the sweet eyes and the happy laugh and the delicate, fragrant personality.

And so they married without asking any one's consent, seeing nothing ahead of them but happiness. Struggle there might be, work there might be and must be—but happiness there should be. For Enid Bryant was something better than being pretty or attractive or beautiful. She was practical, which is a quality that does not always assimilate itself with the artistic nature.

She it was who planned out everything and saw the difficulties and smoothed them away, and who dreamed of the big things that she would do to make herself worthy of this man who had chosen her.

Before he reached home that memorable evening Julian Bryant had resolved that he would not tell his wife what had happened ; but her sympathy was no perfunctory thing : her love was so magnetic that before they had been alone five minutes she had got the whole story out of him. She laughed at first, then she was silent, and then she turned her face away.

"Oh ! Julian dearest," she said. "See what I have done. I have spoilt your life."

He took her in his arms and held her there tightly.

"Spoilt my life ?" he said. "You are going to make it ! Do you suppose I care about this for myself ? It is you I am thinking of."

She kissed him back, but there were tears in her eyes.

"We were in such a hurry," she said.

"We have been so happy," he said.

"Oh ! we shall always be happy, please God," the girl answered, crouching closer to him. "But things are coming clearer to me, Julian. How I wish I had known ! Oh ! I wish I had known !"

"What do you mean, Enid ?"

"Women are queer creatures," his wife answered. "It is not at all an original remark ; but it is very true. What I mean is, I wish that I had seen Mrs. Marnock. I wish I had told her that we wanted to get married."

"I am glad you didn't meet her," said Bryant a little hardly. "She is a woman who never had a heart, and doesn't know what sentiment is. If you come to think of it, Enid, it shows a mean spirit to have done what she has done to-day."

Enid Bryant took herself away from her husband's arms and moved to the window.

"Perhaps," she said, in a low voice, "perhaps it means something else. You call this woman heartless, you think she has no sentiment. I know she is not young—but, Julian, I understand why she has done this—why she meant to be so good to you . . . you were to be so much to her, perhaps you were to bring her something which all her money had never been able to buy."

Julian Bryant coloured up to the roots of his hair.

"Enid, dearest, don't talk nonsense," he said a little irritably.

"It isn't nonsense, I'm getting at the truth. Julian, you must have given her such a blow; no wonder she—she hates me. Don't you remember when you were ill a year ago, how many times she called to inquire, and the flowers she sent you and the fruit; those lovely flowers which you always sent straight up to my room? There was always an excitement when Mrs. Marnock's car came up to the door. Oh, I understand, I understand!"

Julian took her in his arms again.

"You ~~are~~ a child," he said; "and you are making up romances. Rachel Marnock is nothing but a hard, jealous woman, a bitter creature. If you want to know her real reason for doing things for me, it was to annoy my mother."

"Well, have it your own way," said Enid; "but leave me my romances!"

"Romances!" repeated Bryant. "I wish——" and then he added with a sigh, "I wish to God I could send back that cheque."

Mrs. Julian Bryant was pretty and practical, but she was also very young, and the young delight in burdening themselves with imaginary troubles. The tears that had come to her charming eyes now rolled down her cheeks.

"I knew we ought not to have done it," she repeated. "Everybody at the boarding-house said we were so foolish. I used to hate them when they asked me how we were going to live. Oh! Julian, I love you so much, and yet I am hurting you through my love."

The husband took her in his arms and kissed away her tears, and after a while the trembling

of her lips stopped, and he conjured back her smile.

"We are going to show the world that we can do without it," he said.

CHAPTER III.

THEY started out bravely. Enid had left the Academy on her marriage: in fact, she had come to the end of the year's tuition, which had been provided for, and had been very much troubled as to how she was to stay on and work. Her marriage had solved the problem in one direction, but not in another, for the girl missed the busy life, the lessons, the hard work, the encouragement. Ambition was burning within just as keenly as ever, but it had to be kept under. They found two tiny rooms in Kensington, too tiny to hold a piano, even if they could have afforded one. All day long Julian was out; each morning he spent quite a fair amount on newspapers, searching through the columns of advertisements, and hastening to answer such as he felt would be suitable.

He walked many miles to interview all kinds of people, and Enid would sit waiting for him to come home, and whilst she waited, exercising her fingers on the table and pretending to herself that she was

practising. She was always radiant when he came back, no matter how tired or dispirited or cross he might be ; she had the knack of making any little place home, and her tiny sitting-room was so pretty. Somehow there was always a flower to give perfume and colour, a gift more often than not from the green-grocer round the corner ; and she was so resourceful. She turned to her small housekeeping duties with a zest which surprised herself, and she worried her brain and scorched her hands inventing and cooking original dishes for her husband.

“ What do you think we have for supper to-night ? ” she would cry. “ Sprats à la Enid.”

Or perhaps it was a “ crème Chopin,” composed of an egg beaten up with sugar : or perhaps she would venture to give him a tiny bunch of asparagus. He was so tired, poor Julian ! and he seemed to have so little appetite.

Little Mrs. Bryant shut her eyes resolutely to the only too evident shadow that was falling on the beloved face. She was so delicate in her comprehensive sympathy, so cheering, and she still laughed that bright, fascinating laugh which, if it did not come quite so spontaneous, was a fact known only to herself. At least, she never rested till she had swept away something of the shadow, and brought smiles instead. Nevertheless, despite her little economies, her great care and her bravery, the situation was becoming gradually more difficult. The money went so terribly quickly ! Enid hated asking for more, a feeling which communicated itself to Bryant, for he always forestalled the weekly allowance by a day or two ; and gradually the summer waned and the £250 dwindled, and it was not until the early autumn that Julian Bryant found his first chance, work in the office of a new company.

The salary was just half what he had been having

before, but he accepted it eagerly, and this carried them up to Christmas ; then the new company closed its doors, and he found himself once again without occupation.

It seemed to him that he walked the entire city in these days, and as disappointment after disappointment came to him, there grew up slowly in his mind the ugly suspicion that some one or something was working against him, for many a time when he was just in touch of a berth the chance slipped through his fingers for no satisfactory reason, and he found it given to some one else.

Julian Bryant did not rely merely on his educational qualities to give him work. Long before things had come to this pitch, he had decided (keeping the matter, however, entirely to himself) that if he could not use his brains he would turn to and use his hands.

But here again he failed, the helplessness of his own strength seemed to mock him ; for he could get nothing to do !

If sometimes the question troubled Enid Bryant as to how her husband managed to keep things going, she never spoke of this ; there was between them that most rare and yet most exquisite sympathy which seals the lips in crucial moments ; but gradually Enid began to do things other than laugh in her husband's presence, or cook in his absence : she fell to making plans, plans to solve the problem of the future on her own account.

She had kept away from the Academy purposely ; not even to herself would she confess how her spirit yearned to be working ; but on one occasion (a day when, all against her efforts, a heavy cloud had fallen on her bright young spirit), she met one of her former fellow-students, a girl who had done brilliantly as a pupil, but who had left at the end of Enid's first term.

Sybil Jackson was delighted to see her, and carried

her off to the nearest tea-shop for a chat. She expressed unusual surprise when she heard that Enid had given up her music, and was married.

"Why, my dear," she said, "you had it all before you! I don't mind telling you I should have been furiously jealous of you if I'd stayed on. Surely you aren't going to let everything drop, Enid?"

"It is rather difficult to go on working when one has a home to look after."

"Well, I think your husband ought to know what you're giving up," observed Miss Jackson decisively. "And you're a lot too young to have married; but I hope he is able to keep you well?"

Enid sipped her tea and laughed.

"We are as happy as the day is long," she said.

Sybil Jackson looked at her a little enviously.

"Well, I'm not doing badly," she said; "but of course, it's a lonely life. My people live in the country, and it's simply suicidal to try and get a connection for teaching where they are, so I've had to stay on in town. You'll come and see me, won't you, Enid? I've got a flat, too, a tiny one right at the top of the block, but there's such a lovely view from the window, and then I can work at the piano as much as ever I like, and I don't disturb anybody, which is the great thing, you know!"

It was Enid's turn to be envious now.

"How long do you practise?" asked Miss Jackson.

A flush came into Julian's wife's cheeks as she confessed that she never touched the piano.

The other girl scolded her sharply.

"I call it positively criminal," she said; "but it's always the way; when girls marry they give up everything. I don't know what your husband's like, but I can't help feeling that you've made a fool of yourself. Why, my dear, I'll tell you straight now, they expected you to carry everything before you.

You might have been a great pianist with your personality and your temperament. It isn't too late even as it is."

Enid said nothing to her husband of this meeting with Sybil Jackson. She felt more depressed after she and the other girl had parted, and yet unconsciously Miss Jackson had inspired her with new hope, had put something into her mind to occupy her thoughts and to help her in formulating those plans which kept her awake at night, and yet which she cherished as being perhaps a tangible solution to their many small problems.

Matters conspired to help her, for at Julian's restless suggestion they changed their rooms and came nearer town; and to Enid's delight this new home, small and dingy as it was, held one promise of joy for her, for there was a piano in their sitting-room, an old jangly, well-worn instrument, but still a piano, and when Julian Bryant was out and she felt safe for some hours, his wife would sit working at that piano, making the old notes ring again with the music which had almost passed from them. And then one afternoon, a cold and dreary day, she made her way to a well-known concert agent and begged to be allowed to play to him.

The brilliant promise of her student days was well fulfilled, fortunately, for she played to a critical listener, a man who was sparing of praise, and who never gave encouragement unless it could be honestly given.

But he saw a future in this girl: love and the suffering which love brings had awakened the soul in Enid; she played now as she had never played before. Her heart seemed alive with excitement and joy as she hurried home after that momentous interview.

Julian had come back from one of his fruitless

errands ; he was sitting by the fire trying to read.

His wife's heart sank as she looked at him, and he frowned as he looked at her ; and as she knelt beside him and told him the story of what she had done and what lay before her in the future, the delight, the hope, the excitement faded out suddenly.

" You think I am going to be idle and let you work ! " Julian said. " You must be mad ! "

They were the first rough words he had spoken to her, and they hurt very badly. Still Enid tried to hold her own.

" Dearest, " she said, " what does it matter which of us works ? We are not two, we are one ; and if it comes my way— ”

" I tell you, I won't have it ! " Bryant answered hardly. " I am not going to let you earn money to keep me ; and I am not going to let my wife turn herself into a show person, to be stared at and criticised, and get her head turned with stupid flattery."

Enid laughed, but there were tears in the laughter.

" Oh, Julian dear, " she said, " I am so sorry ! I thought you would have been pleased."

" Pleased ! " said Julian Bryant. " You've got queer notions of what is likely to please me, I must say ! "

So Enid never went back to the man who had given her such hope, and the little old piano remained shut.

They stayed on through the winter, and the early part of spring. Little Mrs. Bryant rarely laughed now ; indeed, gradually there fell upon the two young people a silence. They walked together, they sat together ; they were always together ; but the misery of their position never let them be together really.

When the anniversary of their wedding-day came round, Julian Bryant found himself literally without a shilling in his pocket.

He went out in the usual way, kissing his wife gravely and saying nothing ; and suddenly there came upon him the impulse to go to Rachel Marnock.

“ If I humble myself, if I give her the satisfaction of letting her know that she was right, perhaps she may do something for me ; at least I shall know whether she is working against me, and if she is, by God, I won’t spare her ! ”

But when he called at the well-remembered office the porter gave him the information that Mrs. Marnock was not there.

“ She don’t come often now, sir,” he said. “ She has been ailing a bit this winter, and is abroad somewhere in foreign parts ; leastways, that is what I hear.”

Bryant thanked the man and gave him a smile. He remembered the last time he had entered the office, and how beautiful life had seemed to him then.

He had only gone a few yards down the street when the porter ran after him.

“ Oh ! sir, I beg your pardon, sir,” he said ; “ but I’ve just heard as Mrs. Marnock’s come back. She is in London. You know where she lives, don’t you ? ”

“ Yes,” said Julian Bryant.

Again acting on impulse, he hailed a ‘bus and was carried westwards.

There was something new beating in his heart, something that dispelled for a little while the wretchedness. It was hope. For if she were ill and suffering, then perhaps this would be the moment in which to approach her. She had been good to him, she had shown him kindness more than any other person in those days when everything had been taken from him so suddenly ; he only wanted work,

not favours, only the means of earning a living for himself and for one dependent on him.

He made his way by degrees to her house ; she lived in one of the most fashionable quarters ; he had dined at this house twice in the old days, when her husband had been alive, and he had been summoned there to discuss his future.

The luxury, the beauty, the wealth contained in this house had said very little to him then, because to a certain extent he had been accustomed to such things ; but now, as he stood on the doorstep, the remembrance of this woman and her power mocked him and he almost turned away.

Necessity was, however, so pressing that he set his lips and put his heel on his pride. He was not destined, nevertheless, to see Mrs. Marnock, as he was given the information that she was not well enough to receive any one. She was confined to her room.

"Will you give me a message, sir ? Would you like to write a note ?"

Julian Bryant said "No" at first, and then he changed his mind.

"Yes, I'll write."

He sat down at the table in the wide, spacious hall so charmingly arranged, having treasures on the walls ; it was scented with flowers, a glimpse of another world. He did not choose his words, he wrote like a man distracted.

"I want you to help me ; I've tried everything, and everything has gone against me. You were once very good to me and I disappointed you. I'm sorry ; but just because you were good to me once I want you to give me another chance. I've come to my last penny. I don't ask you to take me back into your office, but a word from you would give me work somewhere else. I ask you to speak that word."

He signed it with his full name, and his hand trembled as he inscribed hers on the envelope.

He hardly knew where he walked when he left the house ; he was agitated, nervous, unhappy. Now that he had written to her he felt as if he had done wrong, and yet—and yet, a drowning man will clutch at a straw, and unless he had help, he, too, would go under, perhaps never to come to the top again.

He found himself after a while in Piccadilly, and gave a great start when some one hit him on the shoulder. Turning, he faced a man he knew well, a former chum, one of his old regiment just home from India on leave.

" You are the first of our fellows I've struck, Bryant. What are you doing ?—nothing ? Well, come along, we'll have a ' peg ' first and then we'll have lunch. Good Lord ! how nice it is to be back in the old country ! "

In a dazed sort of way Julian followed the other man into a club. It was like a glimpse of old days to sit at a well-appointed table, to hear regimental "shop," to talk over old times and old friends ; and out of this there came a suggestion.

The man, home from India, was too tactful to express the sympathy he felt for Bryant ; neither could he offer assistance, at least not the assistance which he felt pretty surely was what the other man needed ; but the shabby look of his former chum, the misery in Julian's eyes hurt him dreadfully, and he would not let his guest go till they had talked things over and he had made Julian promise to meet him again in a couple of days' time.

The next day he wrote saying that he had backed a winner and that his chum was standing in with him, and with the cheque he enclosed came the suggestion :

" Why don't you learn all there is to know about a car ? " he wrote ; and then he added : " I may be on

to a good thing again next week at Kempton, and if so I shan't forget you. Don't be stuffy about this, old chap ; you know we must stand by one another ; and you were good to me in many ways when I first joined."

That night Julian Bryant told his wife that things were changed, and that he was going to serve an apprenticeship at some motor works.

"With just a little luck, I'll be able to turn in something before long," he said.

"You mean you are going to learn to drive a cab ?" asked Enid, with a little catch in her voice ; and her husband nodded his head.

"Yes," and then he added grimly : "if I get the chance."

"If you drive a cab, why can't I play in public ?"

And Julian Bryant caught his breath as he answered her :

"Because I won't let my wife work."

He kissed her and held her very tightly in his arms.

"Please God, we are going to get through with our bad times very soon now, darling," he said.

After that he was out of the house all the time, and Enid worked again incessantly on the old piano.

"Some day he will change his mind and let me share the work," she said to herself ; and though she loved him because of his proud resolution, she only permitted his will to sway her for a time longer.

The duties at the works kept Julian out till very late ; he put in at least fourteen hours a day at the start ; there were no more pretty little dinners, no more invented delicacies. The tired man just swallowed his food and got to bed, in haste to snatch what sleep he could before dawn and duty came again.

There were no more walks, no more dreamy, happy discussions, no more plans for the future ; poverty had worked a blight on the happiness of these two young people, the sordid ugliness of a life destitute of charm had come between them. Enid cherished her hope and her faith in the sunshine to come, but it was no easy task, for Julian was so changed !

When the work had come, his wife had felt that this heavy cloud that rested so tangibly upon them would surely be lifted, but Julian's spirit had seemingly lost the trick of catching hope ; he was not merely physically tired ; the man was morose, cynical, cruelly hard at times, and Enid could never have guessed at the real cause of this change in her husband. Rachel Marnock's silence, that humiliating silence, did more than disappoint, it burned.

The fact that he had humbled himself to write and solicit her help embittered Bryant ; a hundred times a day he tortured himself with the recollection of that letter. He did not hesitate to curse the woman to whom it had been addressed.

And then, one day, the papers put out in large letters the news that Mrs. Marnock was dead ; her millions gave her a place of importance ; her death was a fact of public interest.

Julian Bryant read the news, and a quick pang of regret shot through him ; it was followed by a strange sense of relief. The humiliation was lifted from him. Her silence was now explained. She must have been too ill to write. He was sorry he had misjudged her. Death is the great leveller.

Neither he nor his wife spoke of the dead woman when they met that night, nor did they ever discuss her death. The very name of Rachel Marnock had power to stab them both. The young wife had never known exactly what words had been spoken in that most

remarkable interview ; but she had a quick imagination. She could guess. And many and many a time of late, Enid had forced herself to confess that Mrs. Marnock's fierce denunciation of their marriage had at least the merit of common sense to recommend it. At any rate, she always shrank from the mere recollection of Rachel Marnock. Enid had no time nor chance to read the papers, so was ignorant of the fact that everybody was talking about Mrs. Marnock and the money she had left. The will had made a sensation ; there was so much money. The wonderful bequests to charity, the almost ironical disposition of her fortune was the theme of the moment.

Unlike his wife, Julian Bryant knew of all this, and that his heart should be sore with envy, as he read the names of those whom this death had enriched, was only natural. Her relations, her secretaries, her servants, all those who had worked for Rachel Marnock had been remembered, even some of his own kith and kin (people connected with the dead woman through her marriage) were mentioned as benefiting by the will.

Although he was doing splendidly in his new work, and the promise of earning a steady wage was drawing daily nearer, the bitterness that had crept into Julian Bryant's heart still poisoned him. He was always sullen now ; his wife saw less and less of him, he even forgot at times to kiss her when he went out and came in. And little by little, there stole into Enid's mind the suspicion that there was an element of mystery underlying her husband's changed manner.

She grieved for her lost happiness, but there was a touch of natural resentment in her sorrow. She did not understand why Julian should treat her so unkindly, unless, indeed, he had lost all love for her, and she would not let herself think this, yet ; still,

their life was so different. There seemed to be nothing she could do for Julian. He put her aside as completely. She knew nothing of his work or of his prospects. He seemed to have a good deal of business about which she knew nothing.

Letters came frequently now, but he put them in his pocket unopened, to be read when he was alone.

Once, as she was looking at him, noting with a pang at her heart how tired he was, and how his good looks had faded, their eyes met. There was such an agonised expression in the man's face that Enid's lips trembled. She rose, and going across, she kissed him tenderly.

" You are worrying about something," she said. " Dearest, my dearest, won't you tell me what it is ? "

" Don't imagine things," Julian answered, and he spoke roughly ; but he caught her to him and kissed her as he had not kissed her for a long time, and a flame of happiness ran through her, radiating all that was dark, for just a little while.

" I want you only to remember that I am here," she whispered to him unsteadily—" that I love you . . . that I would do anything for you, Julian, anything, my dear one, anything ! "

His voice was not steady as he answered her :

" I know it," he said, and his voice was strange and hard. She drew away from him, and all was dark once again, for it seemed to her as if her loving words had carried hurt to him instead of comfort.

That night he told her he was going to the country, on the morrow, to be tested in his driving ; he might be absent all day.

Enid was up to give him his breakfast, and she sent him to his work with a loving kiss, and a blessing, felt if not spoken, and then she went back to bed

again, for it was very early, and she cried a little while ; she was so unhappy.

After she had risen and dressed, she roused herself. The little home had to be cleaned, and there was mending to be done, for Julian's work played great havoc with his clothes.

And while Enid swept, and dusted, and even scrubbed, her heart was with him. She determined to meet him with a smiling face and planned to give him something very nice for his supper. Once again she set herself to look optimistically to the future. Perhaps to-day would be a turning-point in their lives ; if he did well to-day, he might soon be in regular work. That the work would be in a sense menial had ceased to vex her tender spirit. They had tested so many degrees of suffering that there remained not a glimmer of snobbery to either of them.

As she settled herself finally with her needles and cottons and a coat of his (in which there was a big rent) in her lap, something happened. A letter slipped out of one of the pockets of the coat and fell on the floor.

As Enid Bryant stooped to pick up this letter and replace it, she paused suddenly. A certain name inscribed, caught her eyes.

A flame of colour rushed into her face, and her heart beat hurriedly. She hesitated, looked again at the letter, put it aside ; then once more she hesitated, and then her decision was taken.

Pushing aside the coat, she spread out the paper on the table in front of her. It was a communication from a firm of solicitors, was dated a week previously, and headed "*Re* the late Mrs. Marnock," and was evidently one of numerous letters ; those mysterious letters which he had never opened in her presence. Enid read carefully through this lawyer's letter, and

when she had done so she sat and covered her face with her hands. She was trembling from the effect of a great, a dreadful shock. For this letter recapitulated in curt legal terms certain facts which had already been communicated to her husband ; and these facts dealt with a bequest made by the late Mrs. Marnock to Julian Henry Bryant.

The amount of this bequest was so large that the figures danced before Enid's eyes.

The lawyers had written, apparently, to repeat once again that there had been no mistake, nor was there any possibility of compromise ; their duty was to pay over this money to Mr. Bryant, only if he fulfilled the condition attached to the bequest.

And what was this condition ?

If he agreed to live his life apart from the girl he had married, then Julian Bryant would be a rich man, a man with an assured position, a man with power ! If he refused to fall in with this condition, then not a penny would pass into his possession.

Julian Bryant's wife sat, she hardly knew how long, with her trembling hands pressed to her hot eyes. She thought she had gone through as much suffering in the last few months as a woman's heart can bear ; but nothing that had gone was as bad as this. To feel that she stood a tangible barrier in his path ! That she who loved him, who would have given her life for him if it had been demanded of her, should be recognised as a bar to all that was worth having in life, was a tragedy in its way, it destroyed so much. Now was explained to her so much ; the irritability, the restlessness, the unspoken trouble ; all those things that had drawn her husband so surely away from her !

CHAPTER IV.

WHEN the lawyers employed by the late Mrs. Marnock, who were administrators of her estate, had informed Mr. Bryant of the extraordinary legacy left to him by their late client, they had further instructed him that he was to be allowed only a certain amount of time in which to come to a decision.

Messrs. Pleydell and Cousens showed Mr. Julian Bryant the greatest courtesy, and in a degree, sympathy.

It appeared that Mr. Pleydell, the senior partner, had received direct instructions only about a week or so before her death, from Mrs. Marnock herself, regarding the money which she desired to bequeath to Mr. Bryant. She had, it appeared, duly informed the lawyer that with this bequest a certain condition was attached ; and Mr. Pleydell was the first to assure Mr. Bryant that, had he been aware of the very peculiar nature of this condition, he should have done his best to have advised his late client to abandon it.

It was not, however, until after her death, when a sealed letter arrived and had been opened, that Mr. Pleydell had been informed of what had been in his late client's mind. He had no hesitation in declaring that he found the suggestion something more than peculiar.

" It is a downright incentive to immorality " he had said in his first interview with Mr. Bryant ; and the young man had answered him bitterly :

"It is not immoral, it is inhuman. Mrs. Marnock was very angry with me because I married without informing her of my intentions to do so. This is the way of hitting at me for having dared to be independent."

"Very curious," Mr. Pleydell had said, "but Mrs. Marnock was a very unusual woman, most unusual."

"I would rather a thousand times she had forgotten me," Julian Bryant said. He had the agonising conviction pressing on his heart that she had misread that last appeal, and that she had supposed him not merely beaten by fate but self-confessedly unhappy in his married life. The mere thought was so cruelly disloyal to Enid, he told himself, he would rather die than let her ever know of this strange legacy.

He had sat a long time talking matters over with Mr. Pleydell in that first interview, and finally had gone away in a most wretched condition. His attitude had been firmness itself.

"If the money had been six times what it is," he said, "I should refuse it."

Nevertheless, it was almost pitiful to note the way in which Bryant was drawn to go back again and again to the office just to talk over the legacy, to discover if by some means at least a little of this money could come to him.

"I hate myself for even giving it a thought," he said to Mr. Pleydell on one occasion; "but when a man's down as far as I am, it is simply damnable to be mocked by the knowledge that there is so much money waiting just out of reach."

Pleydell and Cousens sought counsel's opinion, but without any satisfactory result. Grotesque, immoral, inhuman, call it what they might, the terms attached to this legacy were binding. If he chose to remain with his wife, Julian Bryant would not inherit one penny.

He stopped going to the lawyers after the first fortnight, but every now and then he wrote, and always the same answers came back to him ; and the time was growing shorter and shorter. The date on which he must give his decision was drawing very close.

The younger member of the firm Pleydell and Cousens was a certain Mr. Tenderten. He was of a different calibre to Mr. Pleydell, who was an old-fashioned man ; one who was just a little over-weighted and flustered by the new element which Mrs. Marnock's will had brought into the firm.

Mr. Tenderten professed a little sympathy for Julian Bryant. He was not a married man himself, so perhaps that was one reason why he thought it was ridiculous of the other man to allow sentiment to stand in his way ; but then Mr. Tenderten did not really believe that Julian Bryant would hold out to the last. He was prepared to take a bet on the subject. He rather annoyed his colleague by his assurance that no living man would sacrifice so much money for such a reason.

“ You'll see, he'll find a way ! ” he declared to his partner ; but the days went by and nothing happened to prove Mr. Tenderten's conviction.

On the morning of the day before that on which Julian Bryant was bound to give his decision one way or the other, the young man appeared at the office of Pleydell and Cousens almost before the doors were opened.

One of the junior clerks informed him that nobody had arrived, and that Mr. Pleydell was not expected for nearly an hour. He asked Mr. Bryant to wait, but Julian refused. He said he would walk up and down outside.

Mr. Tenderten, alighting from a taxi, saw him in the distance, and was quickly enlightened by the man's look that something new had developed.

Inside, he was given the information by his clerk that Mr. Bryant had been waiting nearly an hour.

"Wouldn't come in, sir ; seems upset about something. He is waiting for Mr. Pleydell."

"All right," said Mr. Tenderten.

He felt quite excited, and only regretted that he had not forced his partner to take on the bet he had offered.

Mr. Pleydell walked sedately to his office, and just as he reached the entrance he was accosted by a wild-looking man, whom at first he hardly recognised.

"You have broken your word to me," said Bryant, "you have done a dreadful thing!"

Instantly the lawyer grasped that he had to deal with a man who was hardly sane.

"Come inside," he said. "We can't discuss business here, Mr. Bryant."

The office was on the first floor. Mr. Pleydell noticed that Julian staggered, and had to hold on to the stair-railing like a man who was not sure of himself, or his own strength. When he was in his office Mr. Pleydell pushed forward a big chair and the young man fell into it with a groan.

"Oh, my head!" he said, "the pain—the pain is torture."

In fact he was trembling like a man with ague.

"You are not fit to be out," said Mr. Pleydell. "You are very ill."

"I have been walking the streets all night," Julian Bryant answered, speaking hoarsely. "My wife has gone—gone— Oh, God! what shall I do?"

"Come, come," said Mr. Pleydell, going forward and putting his hand kindly on Julian's shoulder. "Pull yourself together, Bryant. Tell me what has happened."

"Enid has left me," the young man answered.

"Somehow—somehow she has got to know of this cursed business, and that is why she has gone."

"She has heard nothing from here, Mr. Bryant," the other said quietly. "Your instructions have been obeyed to the letter."

Sitting forward, with his aching head supported by his two shaking hands, Julian said doggedly :

"Well, then, she has got to know of it some other way. But that doesn't matter now, all that matters is—she has gone, and it is going to kill me, Pleydell ; that's what it's going to do."

"Let's talk this out, Mr. Bryant, possibly there may be some mistake. Tell me everything."

Julian sat back in the chair, and for an instant he could not speak. His brows were contracted with pain. In that broken, indistinct voice he said :

"You know I have been working at a garage lately, learning to drive a car. Yesterday I got my first trial. I had to go into the country, and I didn't get back till quite late. I was dogged tired when I got to my rooms. Enid wasn't there—I can't tell you what I felt like when I realised that. I couldn't find my wife anywhere. I roused the people in the house, and they told me she had gone away early in the afternoon, and that she had left a letter for me. Here it is."

The lawyer took the letter from his trembling, outstretched hand.

"DEAREST HUSBAND," Enid had written,—
"I want you to forgive me, but I have grown tired of this life, so tired of being a useless weight on your shoulders. You say you will not let me work, and that you alone must support us ; well, I don't agree with you, and so I am going to take up my share of the burden. I am going to work for myself. To live on as we are living now don't

"You feel as I do, that the sweetness and the beauty of everything is lost? I shall always love you, but I must work, and if you are wise you will not try to bring me back again, at least not until things are better for both of us."

After her signature there were a few more words : "Don't fret about me, I can take care of myself, and I will write to you when I have good news."

"She must be found!" said Julian Bryant, "she must be found!"

Mr. Pleydell folded up the letter and put it on the table.

"It is evident that your wife knows nothing," he said.

But Julian shook his head.

"She'd never have left me," he said. Then he stretched out both his hands to the lawyer.

"Pleydell," he said, "help me to find her. I have got nobody else to whom I can go, and if it costs money I'll work my fingers to the bone to give it back to you. I've got my chance at last; they've taken me on as a regular driver."

"I will do all I can," said Mr. Pleydell. "It won't be difficult. I am sure we will have some news of her before another day has gone. From what you have told me yourself, your wife has no friends. She cannot therefore have been helped by anybody else, and people do not disappear so easily, you know, Mr. Bryant. Now, won't you promise me to go home and take care of yourself?"

Mr. Tenderten came into the office at that moment and looked inquiringly at his partner.

"Mr. Bryant is ill," Mr. Pleydell explained. "He has had a great shock. I am persuading him to go home."

"What sort of shock?" asked Mr. Tenderten

For answer, Mr. Pleydell picked up Enid's letter and gave it to his partner.

Mr. Tenderten read it through and then put it down with a slight smile.

"Well, this leaves the way clear, anyhow," he said. "This fulfils the conditions required by the testator."

The man in the chair opened his eyes and looked fiercely at the speaker. He struggled to his feet with difficulty.

"I won't touch the money," he said thickly, passionately. "Do you hear me? I won't touch the money! That's my last word. I had to give it to you sooner or later, and now you've got it!"

Just for an instant he looked into Mr. Pleydell's eyes.

"I trust you," he said. "You are going to find her; you swear it."

"Your wife shall be found, Mr. Bryant," the elder lawyer answered him quietly.

Julian Bryant closed his eyes and stood swaying uncertainly on his feet for a moment, then he moved like a drunken man to the door.

"Don't come with me," he said to Tenderten. "I can get along alone."

But as he spoke he caught at the door and his eyes closed again, and then suddenly he let go his hold, swayed to and fro helplessly for an instant, and then slipped rather than fell to the floor.

Mr. Pleydell was quite agitated.

"We must send for a doctor," he said. "Poor fellow! I knew he was not fit to be out."

He knelt down and tried to lift Julian, but Mr. Tenderten advised him to leave the man where he was.

"We must get him home," said Mr. Pleydell.

"What will he do when he gets home?" asked the

other man. "There is no one to take care of him. The thing's gone dead out of his hands. You can see that, can't you? Whether this is straightforward, or whether they are acting in collusion, the fact remains that the conditions are fulfilled. This money belongs to Bryant now."

"I don't think we must go so far as that, Tenderten," said Mr. Pleydell. "Mr. Bryant was most emphatic. You heard him yourself. Possibly this illness may permit us to give him a little longer time, but we must not act without him."

Mr. Tenderten shrugged his shoulders, then went into the next room and called a clerk. He sent him for the nearest doctor, and when the medical man arrived it was Mr. Tenderten who interviewed him. As far as the doctor could diagnose the case he pronounced it a form of influenza, accelerated by emotion and fatigue and lack of food. He prescribed conditions which would have been practically impossible in the little place where Julian Bryant had been living.

Mr. Tenderten very gladly took upon himself all the burden of arranging to conduct the sick man to a nursing home.

"Mr. Bryant is a very valuable client of ours," he said. "He has come unexpectedly into a large fortune, and the whole thing has been too much for him."

Mr. Pleydell held himself aloof from the arrangements which his partner made, and the younger man was perfectly well aware that his action was not by any means approved of by the other man. This, however, did not trouble Mr. Tenderten. He was essentially practical.

"He will be the first to thank me one of these days," he said to himself after he had seen Mr. Bryant comfortably housed in a large, airy room with

everything necessary for his comfort surrounding him.

"We will be responsible for all expense," he had said to the doctor; and he went back to the office very well satisfied with the morning's work.

CHAPTER V.

JULIAN BRYANT lay in the small, exquisitely neat bed and watched the sunlight filter through the lace curtains. The window was open and the blinds moved to and fro with a pleasant rhythmical sound. He moved a little on his pillows and gave a sigh every now and then. It was so pleasant to lie still and wake up slowly. Pleasant, and yet there was that sense of doing something what ought not to be done, that this spell of luxurious ease would be followed by a need for extra haste and industry.

He had been dreaming so busily, and he had worked so hard in his dreams that he felt he might permit himself just a few minutes more.

He had been driving for miles. He had got along first rate, doing far better in fact than he had expected to.

He opened his eyes quite widely, looked about him with his brows contracted in a puzzled frown, and at that moment the door opened and a nurse came in.

"It is time for your medicine, Mr. Bryant," she said.

Julian lifted himself on his elbow and looked at her.

"Medicine," he said. "I want my breakfast."

The nurse laughed.

"You have had your breakfast a long time ago."

"I'm quite in a muddle," the young man said weakly, and he sank back on the pillows again. He swallowed the medicine, and the nurse moved away in her soft fashion. At the door she paused :

"Your servant, Stephens, is waiting to come in."

Julian Bryant made no answer, and the nurse passed out, her place being taken almost immediately by a trim-looking valet.

With half-closed eyes Bryant watched this man. He was arranging some clothes on a chair, putting out some smart socks and bedroom slippers ; then he came and stood by the bed.

"Would you like to be shaved now, sir ?" he asked.

"I always shave myself," the man in the bed answered.

The valet made no remark, only observed :

"Very well, sir," and turned away ; but as he was going Bryant called to him :

"I say, who are you ? What are you doing here ?"

"My name is Stephens, sir. I was engaged by your lawyers."

"How long have you been with me ?"

"Going on for a month, sir," said Stephens.

"A month !" repeated Bryant ; then he seemed to wake up completely. He dragged himself into a sitting position. "I don't remember anything," he said, and Stephens answered :

"No, sir ; you haven't seemed to notice anything. I'm glad, sir, you have had a turn for the better. Would you like to get up, sir the doctors, especially Sir Joseph, wish you to be roused. He thinks it would do you good to sit up for a while every day."

Bryant looked at him in a curious fashion ; then he said :

"Yes, I'll get up."

But it was not an easy task ; more than once he would have fallen if Stephens had not held him firmly ; and when at last he was sitting in the chair by the window, wrapped about in a silken dressing-gown, he felt too weak to speak.

He was aroused from another spell of vain thought by Stephens asking him a question.

"The car is here, sir, and the chauffeur wants to know if you have any orders ? "

Bryant looked at him.

"A car ? What car ? "

"Your own car, sir. It comes every day about this time. Sir Joseph is very anxious that you should go out in the air. I have got a light overcoat waiting for you, sir ; I took measurements from your other clothes."

"I don't want to go out," said Bryant.

The valet retired, and the sick man sat on thinking ; but his thoughts troubled him. As Stephens came back, he sat forward trembling a little, and said :

"I want—I want Mr. Pleydell. Send and ask him to come, he must come."

"I'll ring through, sir, to the office."

In a very little while Stephens was back with the information that Mr. Pleydell was away, and would not be back in London for a fortnight or another three weeks.

"Mr. Tenderten is at your service, sir."

"No," said Bryant. "No; I don't want him to come and see me."

The doctor arrived, the one who had been called in to attend him when he had been taken so ill.

"I have been lying in bed too long," said Bryant to him. "Give me something to make me strong. It is hateful to feel as I feel now."

"Ah! this is an improvement," said the doctor. "We have only been waiting for you to make a little effort on your own account, Mr. Bryant."

"What has been happening to me?" asked Julian Bryant.

The doctor detailed his illness.

"Fortunately," he said, "you are so healthy and so young that we have avoided complications; but you had a nasty turn for about ten days, Mr. Bryant. I was very anxious about you."

"You brought me here, I suppose?"

"Yes," said the doctor. "I am responsible for that."

"You are all very good to me," said Julian Bryant. "Perhaps you don't know that I am—that I am a pauper. I can't pay for all this."

"Well, we can wait until you are quite well," was the brisk reply; and in another moment or two Bryant was left to himself again.

He slept brokenly through that night; but each day he seemed to grow a little stronger. A certain spirit was fighting for him, a spirit that had misery in it and anger, and each day fresh evidence was brought to him of the position which he now held.

He had known from Mr. Pleydell that Rachel Marnock's bequest to him embraced more than money invested and lodged in banks. The lawyer had told him that Mrs. Marnock had left him her London house, two of her motor-cars, a yacht, and some horses in training at Newmarket. Some one had

organised everything during his illness ; he learnt incidentally that his house was open, waiting for his return. Daily the cars called in case he should require them. Acting on some one's authority, Stephens had put together a wardrobe suitable for a man of Mr. Bryant's social and financial position. On every hand luxury met him. At times, indeed, he felt like one living in an enchanted land. He had but to move his hand, and his slightest wish was gratified ; and against the strength of that spirit of misery and anger combined, was struggling a conscious element of satisfaction, a delight in the ease, the charm of his surroundings, a re-establishment of personal vanity, a sense of the knowledge of power.

He advanced a little every day, and at last he permitted himself to be conducted downstairs, and put into his luxurious car, and with Stephens beside him, was bowled through the glory of the autumn sunshine, the autumn that still had the embrace of summer in its soft genial air.

Mr. Tenderten heard of the advance of convalescence ; and he smiled as he was told of the daily drives, of the visits to tailors, and of the other trades-people whom Stephens had introduced to his master. He smiled again when he realised that Julian Bryant refused to see him. It was all so in keeping with what he had imagined.

The day came when Mr. Bryant was pronounced well enough to leave the nursing home. The specialist (of course, Mr. Tenderten had decreed that more than one doctor was necessary) prescribed a visit to Torquay, if Mr. Bryant preferred not to go abroad.

The young man listened to all the doctors said to him, but made no remark. On the day that everything was packed, and he was ready to go, Stephens brought him a small leather box.

"Mr. Tenderten said that he thought that you would prefer to write your own cheques, sir."

He handed at the same time a sheaf of bills. Julian Bryant turned very pale and sat for an instant without moving; but Stephens had unlocked the despatch-box and taken out a big cheque-book, and put blotting-paper, pen and ink, in front of his master.

"If you will put your signature, sir, I can easily fill up the rest. These are all the items."

Just for an instant, Bryant hesitated again, then he took the pen and wrote his first cheque.

"I will fill them all in myself," he said. "You shall put them in the various envelopes."

Just before he left, when he was alone, Bryant stood in the middle of the room, and covered his face with his hands. He hated himself for his weakness, he despised himself, and with his hatred there was mingled a longing, that longing which had woven itself into every conscious moment of his life, a longing for the creature who had left him. He had asked no questions, because he felt that he could trust Pleydell, that the lawyer would have broken his silence before this if there had been the need to communicate with him. The fact that Mr. Pleydell said nothing proved to Julian that his wife had been traced; beyond that he dared not let himself think.

He drove away from the nursing home, leaving the impression that for a man so richly endowed as he was he was particularly morose; and he was received in his own house as though he had been living there all his life. It gave Bryant a chill feeling to find himself passing into that hall where he had sat that bygone day, and had written that despairing letter. How far away he had been from imagining the curious turn ~~she~~ had prepared in his life!

Bryant turned to his valet.

"Ring through," he said, "and see if Mr. Pleydell is home. Beg him to come to me at once."

The man returned almost at once and brought the same answer. Mr. Pleydell was still away, but would be returning now in a few days. Mr. Tenderten was at Mr. Bryant's disposal.

"I will wait," said Julian Bryant. "It is Mr. Pleydell I wish to see."

There were letters for him spread out on the table in the hall; writing which he did not know, and others, just a few sent on by his lawyers from his old home.

When Stephens left him he made a pilgrimage round the house, and the vision of Enid grew clearer and clearer before him each step he took.

"Oh! God," he said to himself. "I must see her! I must know what she is doing."

The mere thought of George Tenderten was detestable to him, but he went downstairs deliberately, and he rang up Pleydell and Cousens, and asked to speak with the junior partner.

"I want news of my wife; where is she?" he demanded, when he was put in communication with Mr. Tenderten.

"Mrs. Bryant is perfectly well, but I am sorry I cannot give you her address."

"You say she is well; what is she doing, and how is she living?"

"I am very sorry, Mr. Bryant," the other man answered. "I can really give you no information, beyond the fact that I know that Mrs. Bryant is in good health."

Julian Bryant put back the receiver roughly; then he rang for Stephens.

"I am going out," he said. "I don't ~~quite~~ know when I shall be in."

He made his way, with a heart that beat and

thrilled, to that little dingy street where he and Enid had lodged last. All at once it seemed to him that he could not live through another night without trying for direct news of her.

It was all so familiarly ugly to him when he reached the crowded, shabby neighbourhood in which he and his wife had made their home. How many times he had walked this way with despair eating at his heart and darkening the outlook !

The house had never been so meagre and so dirty, the atmosphere never so disagreeable. When he was face to face with his former landlady, the question Julian Bryant had come to ask was not spoken. He could not expose himself to have this secret of his heart discussed by the unkempt, vulgar, but kindly woman who was eyeing him with almost eager curiosity ; and there flashed back to Julian's mind the last time he had seen this woman and the mental agony he had endured through every hour of that dreadful night.

He stammered out some inquiries about letters ; but the woman of the house told him that everything had been sent on, as directed by himself, to the care of his lawyers.

" And Mrs. Bryant, sir ? You found her again, didn't you ? Oh ! I knew as 'twas nothing but a tiff. She wasn't the one to turn and go off and leave you, not she ! Your old rooms is still unlet, sir. I suppose you wasn't thinking of coming back ? "

" No," said Bryant, almost roughly. Then he thanked the woman and turned away ; but as he was going he walked back again, and he put a sovereign in her hand.

The sight of her was repulsive to him, and she had hurt him in a way that she would have been the last to have understood ; but her loyalty and her admiration for Enid gave her a certain claim on him. He

hurried away from the narrow street, with its stuffy atmosphere and its ugly little houses ; and as he hailed a taxi and was driven rapidly back to his own, and new home, he set his teeth a little grimly. He was not prepared with the exact word with which to describe his present attitude, but he was pretty certain that he could never of his own free will go back to that old life.

A certain new sensation filled him as he alighted from the cab, and was admitted once again to the exquisitely appointed place of which he was sole master. The vision of his wife had grown so faint that it had almost faded out. He was conscious in this moment only of the material satisfaction which the full realisation of his present possession brought to him.

He had been stifled so long, he felt that he was breathing fresh air for the first time.

“ Yes, I will dine at home,” he said to Stephens. “ Ring through and tell them that I shall want a cab here at nine o’clock.”

CHAPTER VI.

IT had been the easiest matter in the world to trace Mrs. Julian Bryant. Mr. Pleydell had fallen back on a well-tried and astute clerk, who happened to be one of the few people who knew the full story of Mrs. Marnock's legacy to Julian Bryant.

In a couple of days' time this clerk brought the information that Mrs. Bryant was staying in Hampstead with a certain Miss Sybil Jackson, who was a musician and gave lessons in singing and the piano.

Mr. Pleydell debated with himself for some little while as to whether he should approach Mrs. Bryant without warning her of his coming. It was just possible that if she knew he intended to call, she might avoid seeing him ; on the other hand, he was himself by no means eager to meet her, for his colleague's precipitate action with regard to Julian Bryant had made the position very difficult for Mr. Pleydell.

He had promised definitely to carry out Julian's wishes with regard to his wife. It seemed to him a breach of faith to draw back from this promise ; yet what could he do ?

Mr. Tenderten had been too quick for him ; apart from the fact that Julian himself was too ill to give definite orders, the installation of him as a patient in a nursing home, the element of luxury which Mr. Tenderten had so cleverly introduced about him : the whole circumstances of the case put it out of Mr. Pleydell's power to approach Enid in the spirit which Julian had desired.

Mr. Pleydell did not hesitate to express very plainly to his partner what he felt about the proceedings.

"You have gone too far, much too far," he said. "It is scarcely fair treatment, Tenderten, as you must be prepared to hear from Mr. Bryant when he is well enough to discuss the matter."

But Mr. Tenderten had only laughed.

"I am not afraid," he answered. "You've got one view about this matter and I've got another, that's all. We'll wait and see who's likely to be right."

"That is absurd!" answered Mr. Pleydell, with some heat. "You have taken away from the man the power of acting independently."

"Well, he can be as independent as he likes when he gets better," the younger lawyer said briskly.

It amused him to see how perturbed his partner was.

"I know what you are worrying about," he said; "you are thinking what you are going to say to the wife; but surely, my dear Pleydell, you ought to know something of human nature. I tell you I am not at all sure that it was not a put-up thing between them that she should disappear in this manner; at any rate, she chose to do so at the very opportune moment! And remember, there is nothing to prevent Bryant from making over as much money as he likes to his wife. There are no restrictions attached to his dealing with what he has, granted that he fulfils the one big condition: the rest lies in his own hands, a matter which I take it he was sharp enough to see."

"We think differently on this point," said Mr. Pleydell, still ruffled, "as we think differently on many points. I can but repeat that I regret most sincerely all that you have done."

"Well," said Mr. Tenderten airily, "I am sorry."

But he was not the least bit sorry.

He saw no end of good things coming to himself from Julian Bryant ; though he was so much younger, he did know just a little more about human nature than Mr. Pleydell.

They did not speak again on the subject ; but the younger man amused himself by watching what his partner did.

Mr. Pleydell waited two or three days, and then he felt that he ought really to make some move in the matter of Enid Bryant. So he made his way to the block of flats in Hampstead, where Miss Sybil Jackson lived.

It was with some relief that Mr. Pleydell was informed that Mrs. Bryant was not at home. He was, however, received by Miss Jackson, and it was evident that she had not the least intention of being pleasant.

"I don't know who you are, and I don't know why you have come ; but if you have been sent by that man, let me tell you that you have made a great mistake. Enid Bryant isn't going to have any more to do with her husband. He has dragged her down quite long enough as it is. It is high time that she stood up for herself, and she is going to do it."

"I have come of my own accord," Mr. Pleydell replied a little coldly. "I am anxious to speak to Mrs. Bryant."

"Well, you can't speak to her," snapped Miss Jackson, "because she isn't here, and she won't be here for some time, either ; she is up in the north of England, working for herself, and working in the proper way ; and if you are seeing Mr. Bryant, you can tell him from me that his wife's done with cooking and scrubbing, and turning herself into a slave for a selfish, idle beast. She's done with him for good."

When Mr. Pleydell mildly ventured to ask if he

might have Mrs. Bryant's address in the north, this was refused.

"No," said Miss Jackson. "Enid made me promise solemnly not to tell any one where she was. If you want to write to her you can send a letter here. I'll see that she gets it."

Mr. Pleydell walked away from the flats, feeling very much annoyed. He had undertaken this little journey actuated by the kindest motives. His intention had been to put things as smooth and right as he could between Julian and his wife: above all, he intended to let Mrs. Bryant know the truth, and to tell her that though apparently her husband had made his choice, this really had been decided for him, and that he was quite unable at the moment to deal with this matter or with any other.

It had crossed his mind to inform that very sharp-tongued young woman that Mr. Bryant was very ill, seriously ill; but she had been so unpleasantly hostile that he had felt it better to say nothing.

In his old-fashioned mind, however, he was greatly disturbed. In the first place, the excitement which had crept into his uneventful life was a most disturbing element. In the second, the appeal that Julian Bryant had made to him, so forcibly, came back every now and then to prick his conscience. For, after all, he had not done what the young man had expected of him; he was to find Mrs. Bryant, to find her in the real sense of the word; yet though she had been traced, she was no nearer returning to her husband.

Mr. Pleydell did not hesitate to confess to himself that it was a cowardly suggestion on his part; but, all the same, he was considerably relieved that, this being the eve of his usual holiday, he would be out of town, when Mr. Bryant would be ~~weak~~ enough to ask questions.

"Probably Tenderten understands this sort of thing better than I do" he said to himself.

One thing he did do, however; he wrote to Enid informing her that he had been instructed by her husband to obtain the knowledge of her whereabouts. In his stilted phraseology he spoke of Mr. Bryant's distress of mind; but he did not go into any details, and he finished his note by begging Mrs. Bryant to be so good as to inform him as to whether she stood in any need of assistance.

Miss Jackson hesitated a little while before sending on the letter to her friend. She had been very kind to Enid Bryant. That memorable day, when the truth of what was passing with her husband had been revealed to Enid in such uncompromising fashion, she had realised that there was only one person who could help her, and though, again and again, she rejected with a little shiver the thought of having to confess to Sybil Jackson that her marriage was such a failure that she had found herself compelled to separate from her husband, no other way presented itself, and finally when she had written that little letter to Julian and had actually left her home, Enid had found herself travelling to find Sybil Jackson in almost an involuntary fashion.

There had been an element of conventional, practical common-sense about Miss Jackson that drew Enid to her in this moment, fraught with so much emotion and suffering. Of course, she could never tell Sybil the true state of affairs. She resolved to put all the blame on herself.

"I must make her understand that it was my fault that we married so hurriedly, and that I am no use for anything. I—I must not tell her the truth, and I can't bear to have her blame Julian."

This, however, was just what Miss Jackson did do. She happened, fortunately, to be at home when

Enid arrived, and she gave the girl a genuinely hearty welcome.

"You know you weren't looking too jolly when we met the other day, although you declared you were so happy," she said; "and I've thought about you an awful lot, Enid. Oh! what stupid fools girls are to go rushing into marriage with the first man they meet! Now, what has happened? Tell me all about it!"

"If you don't mind, Sybil dear, I'd rather not talk to-night. I just want you to understand that—that I am very unhappy, and that I was simply obliged to separate from my husband. I shan't stay with you more than a few days; but I didn't know where else to go."

"You can stay with me as long as you like," said Sybil Jackson; although she was really full of curiosity, she saw that Enid Bryant was in no condition to be questioned; in fact, the other girl's white, tired face and rather forlorn look awoke her pity.

Miss Jackson was an ardent advocate of Woman's Suffrage, and she saw in Enid a forcible example of the disastrous results of what she called "man-made laws." It gratified her pride to feel that Enid had turned to her. She was of a domineering nature, and loved to realise she was of importance.

Of course, Enid was full of plans.

"I want to earn some money," she said as they sat at breakfast two mornings later. "I don't care how I do it, but I've got to live."

"Well, I'll give you one straight tip," said Miss Jackson. "Don't take to teaching. There are far too many of us as it is; and if I hadn't had a little allowance from my people I should have had to give it up months ago."

Enid shrugged her shoulders a little hopelessly.

"I don't want to teach," she said. "I want to learn, I want to study. You know after I met you the other day, Sybil, I went to see that agent you were speaking about. I played to him—and he was very encouraging."

"Was he?" said Sybil Jackson. "Come, that's good, for if Gerstein is encouraging, one is practically launched. I advise you to go to him right away; and look here, Enid, I hope you'll stay with me till you get on to sure ground. What does for one will do for two; and I dare say you'll be able to help me some way or other; in fact, I can give you some work to do for me this morning. I want you to write out this report and post it to these addresses."

Some colour flashed into Enid's face. She was so glad to feel that she could be helpful; but, as she read through the papers, her expression changed.

"Oh!" she said. "Are you a suffragette, Sybil?"

"Yes, my dear," said Miss Jackson. "I am; and it's a splendid thing to be. Before I'm through with you, I shall try and make you see things from my point of view; but I tell you what you have got to do first—sit down and write to Gerstein, say that you are staying with me, and ask him to give you a start of any sort, you don't care what it is."

Mr. Gerstein replied almost immediately to Enid's letter, but he had to regret that he saw no immediate opening. He advised her to come and see him in the course of the next few days.

It was Miss Jackson who solved the problem of the immediate moment.

When she got back one afternoon a day or so later, she had some news.

"I believe I've got a chance for you, Enid," she said. "Do you remember Manon Laurie, who was at the Academy just when you joined?"

"I remember her very well," said Enid. "She had a lovely voice."

"Yes, she doesn't sing badly," said Miss Jackson. "Well, I met her sister this afternoon, and she tells me that Manon is out in the country with a little concert party and that the pianist has cracked up ill and Manon had telegraphed to her sister to try and get some one to fill his place. I proposed you. Will you go?"

"Yes," said Enid in a low voice. "That's—that's just what I should like. I am so anxious to be doing something."

"Well, there is no doubt about it, you're jolly lucky," said Miss Jackson frankly. "It's just a fluke, you know. You mustn't run away with the idea that you are going to tumble into good things just whenever you want them. I promised to ring up Lucie Laurie as soon as I had seen you. There is a telephone at their flat, I'll just run round to the call office. You had better put a few things together, because you'll have to leave here to-night by eight o'clock."

"Oh! I am glad! I am glad!" Enid said to herself as her friend hustled out and she was left quite alone. She hardly dared to confess to herself how much it cost her to be in London and not to approach her husband.

She had been living in a curious kind of dream, ever since the moment when she had closed the door of her little home behind her, and had turned to step forward into a world unknown, untried.

All through the first day that had followed on her arrival at Sybil Jackson's flat, her heart had fluttered nervously, apprehensively, excitedly, for the conviction was strong upon her, that almost at any moment Julian would come and demand an explanation from her, insisting upon her returning;

but that day passed and was followed by another, and still another, and yet Julian did not come. Then Enid Bryant realised to the full what she had done. With her own little hands she had cut herself adrift from the one creature to whom she had a right to cling. And she wanted him ! Indeed, she hardly knew how she lived through the long, torturing hours.

She began to heap reproaches upon herself : she confessed that she had done Julian a wrong, the mere fact that the man had fought so resolutely, had gone so valiantly through the fire of temptation, proved to her that she was something more to him than all else in the world.

The arguments that she had brought to bear on herself that day when she had learnt that Rachel Marnock had bequeathed a fortune to her husband, seemed to have lost their value now. They were man and wife, bound by vows to stand to one another : not even her yearning desire to give back to him something of what had once been in his life should ever have permitted her to make these vows.

There were times when her self-sacrifice seemed to her not only foolish, but wicked. And yet now, there was no going back.

Julian was lost to her, for if he had wanted her, surely he would not have rested till he had found her !

She was afraid of shedding tears in Sybil Jackson's presence, and though she appreciated far more than she could express, the ready hospitality extended to her, the fact that she had to let her husband remain under a false impression, that she had to listen to abuse of him, and that, of course, Miss Jackson took a wrong view of their separation, was becoming almost unbearable. Now that she realised he would not come, she wanted to get away, far away from everything that reminded her of their life together.

As she travelled up swiftly to the north that night,

Enid Bryant cried till she had reduced herself almost to a state of exhaustion. She was very unhappy, and it was all so strange to find herself as she did, towards midnight, in a little hotel room, cut away from everything that was dearest to her.

She looked very tired and white and ill the next day, and the members of the little concert party shrugged their shoulders.

"I hope you won't break down, too," said Manon Laurie to her. She herself was strong and splendid looking, and she emphasised Enid's fragile look.

"I am only a little tired," Enid said hurriedly. "I shan't disappoint you. I'm really very strong." In fact so interested was she in the rehearsal, in adapting herself to the requirements of the work, that by lunch-time she looked another being.

They were just a number of young people, students for the most part, who had formed themselves into this little party and who, with Miss Laurie as their great attraction, had been meeting with quite fair success.

The money offered to Enid seemed to her more than adequate when she remembered how little she and Julian had managed to live on, but she quickly found that she had many expenses.

Manon Laurie went back to her little room and examined her wardrobe. She was a kind-hearted young woman, and therefore she put the matter as delicately as she could; but Enid realised that she would have to furbish up some sort of gown in which to appear on the platform.

"I think you ought to go in for the picturesque style," said Manon Laurie. "Look here, that little grey frock, if you put some lace on it like a fichu, I think that will do, at least for to-night. You have got such sweet hair, and you are very interesting looking, you know; and, my dear, you do know how

to play accompaniments. My songs never went better than they did this morning."

It was just the word of appreciation which Enid needed ; it gave her courage and it strengthened her.

Naturally she was nervous, and she resolutely set herself to get a little rest before the evening.

When the time came to dress she handled the little grey gown tenderly. It was one of the dresses that she had worn in Venice, just a simple little frock, made by an unfashionable dressmaker ; but in Julian's eyes it had been lovely. She could hear his voice now, whispering tender words in her ears, she could feel his arm about her. It was impossible for her to realise in such a moment that she and Julian were separated. separated perhaps, actually never to meet again !

" If only he had written me one word, if only he had let me know that he cared," she said to herself, brokenly.

CHAPTER VII.

R. TENDERTEM was a man with certain ambitions : he was resolved to have money, not a small and modest income, but real, solid money, and he was infected also with the very common complaint of desiring to mingle intimately with those who moved in a higher social sphere to his own.

He was a self-made man. The son of a small tradesman in a Midland town, it had been open to him to follow in his father's footsteps, to live as his father had done, and to marry as his father had done, and to be comfortably provided for. But he had turned his back on the little Midland town, and the small shop ; had articled himself to a lawyer, who had done business with his father from time to time. He worked on steadily, losing no opportunity till chance had given him a place in the well-known firm of Pleydell and Cousens.

This chance had cost him a very fair amount of the money he had put together, but he had regarded it as a good speculation.

Pleydell and Cousens were an old-established firm, patronised by clients of wealth and social importance ; and Mr. Tenderten intended to lose no opportunity of ingratiating himself with such clients.

In a very little while, he found himself constantly in request. Certain people always preferred to deal with Mr. Pleydell (the late Mrs. Marnock had been one of these), but others found Mr. Tenderten very useful, very obliging, and very prompt.

Among these latter was Lady Ellen Crooper, a

pretty and charming young woman, who lived in a small house in the neighbourhood of Berkeley Square. Lady Ellen was the widow of a certain sporting baronet who had drunk himself to death in a conveniently short time, not, however, till he had managed to squander all his money, and a good deal of what had belonged to his wife.

Lady Ellen was in constant pecuniary difficulties. Mr. Pleydell had been very straightforward with her, and had told her some time before that she was living considerably beyond her income, a fact of which Lady Ellen was perfectly well aware.

"What you have to do, my dear Mr. Pleydell," she had said, "is to show me the way of getting some money! No, it's no use at all my approaching my father; he has practically washed his hands of me; none of Charlie's family will do anything for me." Lady Ellen had laughed here. "I suppose I didn't play the game," she said. "If I had made up to them and gone to stay at their deadly dull week-end parties, and bored myself stiff, they might have made me an allowance; but life's far too short to be bored, you know, Mr. Pleydell."

Mr. Pleydell had found himself singularly out of sympathy with Lady Ellen Crooper, and when his younger partner had suggested that he should handle Lady Ellen's affairs, he had quite willingly passed over this portion of his business to the other man.

The change was all for the better where Lady Ellen was concerned; almost at once Mr. Tenderten began to see possibilities, to make suggestions; for instance, certain stocks and shares which she had regarded as useless were so manipulated by him as to realise quite a decent sum of money.

Therefore the coming of Mr. Tenderten into the financial side of her life was a matter of great rejoicing to Lady Ellen.

She was impulsive and generous.

"You must come and dine with me," she had said almost at once ; and Mr. Tenderten dined frequently, on an average, once a week.

Lady Ellen was not very sure that she liked him, but he talked amusingly, and was always well stocked with society gossip and scandal.

Needless to say, Mr. Tenderten clung to this intimacy with the tenacity of a limpet.

He meant to use Lady Ellen ; she should be the means through which he would enter into that world in which it was his ambition to move as a person of importance ; already he had met many delightful people at her house ; though she called herself a pauper, she managed to keep an extremely good cook and gave charming dinners : in fact, everything about her was charming ; she was pretty, fascinating, and dressed to perfection.

Of course, Lady Ellen had innumerable admirers ; but always declared she never intended to marry again.

"I know you don't believe me," she cried, on one occasion, to a certain man who paid her very rare visits, but who was always very welcome whenever he did come.

"I don't disbelieve you, my dear," this man said, "because no doubt you imagine that you are in earnest. It is always a woman's privilege to change her mind, you know."

"I wish you wouldn't call me a woman," said Lady Ellen restlessly.

"Well, what are you—a camel ? "

She laughed and flung a flower at him.

"I hate to be considered one of a class," she said. "I like to be something apart—myself. You mustn't deny me my individuality."

I will deny you nothing," said Adrian Dawney ;

he got up as he spoke and stood to his full height : he was very tall and splendidly built. He had been a soldier. Though he was young, not yet forty, his hair was grey, and he had a serious look, that look which comes into the faces of most men who have stared at death and many ugly things.

Adrian Dawney was a cousin, by marriage only, of Lady Ellen's ; and perhaps the man hardly realised himself how warm and sure was the place he had in this dainty creature's regard.

Lady Ellen was tall too ; but he dwarfed her ; and her hand seemed ridiculously small when she slipped it into his strong brown right one.

" And now you are going back to the country, to your hens and your pigs and all the rest of your farmyard, and I shall never see you again, Adrian ! "

The man laughed.

" Oh ! yes, you will. I have to come up, as a matter of fact, to see Pleydell about some business of my mother's."

" Well, it was awfully good of you to come, Adrian. I always make a red mark on my calendar when you have been to see me, because it is such an important event."

" What are you doing in town just now, anyhow ? " Dawney asked, as she took her hand away from his and moved across to the window.

She shrugged her shoulders.

" I too had to be in town for some business," she said ; " and then—oh ! well, you don't know how fed up I get with everything sometimes, Adrian ! I've just come back from staying with Carrie Sunshawe. I used to be amused with Carrie once ; now, well——" She shrugged her shoulders, adding, almost immediately, " I am not quite sure that you haven't got the best of it, Adrian. There are such a

lot of beastly people in the world. I believe real pigs must be much nicer!"

The man looked at her with a strange expression in his eyes, and the slightest of slight sighs escaped his lips. Then he smiled faintly.

"Why don't you come down and stay with me, Nell, for a little while?" he suggested.

"What on earth should I do at a farm?" asked Lady Ellen; but her beautiful eyes had a sudden eager look in them.

"Come and see," Colonel Dawney answered. He said "Good-bye" a second time, and then with another smile that swept aside for an instant the gravity of his expression, he turned and went away.

Lady Ellen moved to follow him, but stopped as she reached the door, paused and shrugged her shoulders; then she said:

"I am a fool!—a fool!"

A moment later her butler brought up a note that had arrived by hand. It was from Mr. Tenderten. He wrote to say that he had a box for a certain musical piece which Lady Ellen had expressed a great desire to see, and he wanted to know if she would give him the pleasure of occupying the box that evening.

"Please ask any one you like," he wrote. "I am dining out, but I should like to come in during the evening if I may and pay my homage to you."

"He really is rather a dear!" said Lady Ellen.

She scribbled back a reply, accepting the box, and thanked Mr. Tenderten very warmly; then she spent the next half-hour in telephoning to such people as were in town; and finally got her cousin, the Duchess of Wiltshire, to promise to join her.

It was part of Mr. Tenderten's shrewd cleverness just to hover on the outskirts of Lady Ellen's life, never to permit her to get bored or bothered with him; but his heart had a little thrill as he realised

that she was now beginning to drift more surely into his hands ; and certain vague dreams which he had scarcely permitted himself to define did take faint shape in such a moment as this.

He arrived at the theatre after having eaten a dull dinner at his club, just in time for the last act ; and his heart gave a new thrill as he realised that Lady Ellen was accompanied by no less a person than the Duchess of Wiltshire.

It was a proud moment for Edgar Tenderten to be seen escorting two such well-known women, when the curtain dropped and every one trooped out of the theatre.

In the vestibule he had the satisfaction of meeting several people whom he knew in the city, and to whom he vouchsafed just a cool nod of the head ; but as he returned from seeking the duchess's footman, he came face to face with a man whom, at first, he only just vaguely recognised. Then Mr. Tenderten smiled his curious smile, for this man was Julian Bryant. They exchanged only a few words, and then Mr. Tenderten hastened back to his party.

But Lady Ellen had noticed Julian.

" What an awfully good-looking man ! " she said. " He reminds me of some one I know. Who is he ? I saw you speaking to him."

" His name is Bryant," Mr. Tenderten said. " He has just come into a pot of money ; he's an awfully nice chap ! I am afraid he is lonely ; he doesn't seem to know anybody."

" Introduce me," said Lady Ellen in her autocratic way.

Mr. Tenderten hesitated just a fraction of a second, and then went to do her will.

As he turned away, Lady Ellen turned to the duchess.

" I have sent him to bring that man to be

introduced ; doesn't he remind you of Adrian before he went out to Africa ? ”

The duchess examined Julian Bryant through her long eye-glasses and nodded her head.

“ Yes ; he is rather like Adrian,” she said. “ Who is he ? ”

Lady Ellen shrugged her shoulders in her favourite fashion.

“ I don't know ; but he looks nice ! I say, Poppy, won't you come back and have some supper with me, then I can ask these two men to come, too.”

But the duchess smiled.

“ I am off to the country quite early to-morrow,” she said. “ You had better let me take you with me, Nell. You aren't looking a bit the thing, you know ! ”

“ Oh ! I am only tired,” Lady Ellen answered in her restless way.

The next moment she was smiling on the man who had followed Mr. Tenderten rather shyly and, in a sense, not willingly.

“ How do you do, Mr. Bryant ? ” she said in her pretty, frank manner. “ Do you know, you are so exactly like a cousin of mine that I very nearly spoke to you without an introduction.”

She presented him to the duchess, and they chatted on about the play. After the first moment of uneasiness, Julian drifted back quite naturally to the proper attitude. Indeed, it seemed to him, as he stood there talking to these women of society, that he was just what he had been in those years before his father's death, and that all that had followed afterwards had been nothing but a strange dream.

Mr. Tenderten found himself envying the other man, for there was something about Julian Bryant's manner and way of speaking which he would never acquire. And with this there was a faint suggestion of jealousy,

for undoubtedly Julian Bryant was a handsome man. Nevertheless, Mr. Tenderten felt that he held the strings in his hands.

There had been no question of discussion between himself and Bryant as yet: no suggestion as to the share Edgar Tenderten was to have in the good things which had fallen so lavishly to Bryant. But this was all to come, and Mr. Tenderten smiled a little grimly to himself, as he wondered what Lady Ellen and her cousin would say if they were to know that only a few weeks before, this man, to whom they were talking so pleasantly, had been nothing higher in the social scale than the driver of a cab in the public streets.

"I intended to have asked you both back to supper with me," said Lady Ellen, as the duchess's footman announced that the motor-car was approaching; "but my cousin wants to go home, so my supper must be for another occasion. Do come and see me, Mr. Bryant. I'm in London, alas!—I almost say 'alone in London,' for everybody belonging to me is scattered."

"I will come," said Julian.

He had a slow, curious way of speaking, and the more Lady Ellen looked at him the more she traced the resemblance between him and Adrian Dawney, although as a matter of fact, the resemblance existed far more in suggestion than in definite likeness.

The two men stood at attention as the car rolled away; then Tenderten slipped his arm familiarly through Julian's.

"I'll walk back with you," he said. Then he laughed. "So glad to see you going out and about, Bryant; that's a sensible thing to do! A man gets hipped to death if he always stays with his own society."

"I came out to lose my own society," Bryant answered.

He drew his arm away from Mr. Tenderten's hand ; and occupied himself in lighting a cigarette.

" I'm none too good company for myself," he added ; then he held out his hand. " I hope you won't think me inhospitable, Mr. Tenderten ; but I am not going straight home."

" All right, old chap," said Edgar Tenderten lightly, although he was really annoyed. " I'll look you up very soon. Why not come and dine with me at my club to-morrow night ? That reminds me, Bryant, of course you'll belong to some clubs yourself."

" I have no plans." Bryant answered him coldly, almost rudely. " Good night."

He nodded his head and crossed the road to escape from further conversation ; and he drew a deep breath of relief as he found himself alone. It was true ; he did not go straight home, but walked the streets for hours. It was a lovely night ; there was a glorious moon ; but the beauty of the night was blotted out for Julian. He despised himself, and yet he knew that he was powerless now to stand between himself and the future, which this man from whom he had just parted had thrust upon him.

MONEY OR WIFE?

CHAPTER VIII.

AFTER hesitating a very long time, Julian resolved to write a few lines to Frank Derryman, the man home from India who had been so good to him.

He sent the letter to the club, and did not expect to hear for some time, for, when last he heard from Derryman, the other man had told him that he was going over to Ireland for at least a couple of months.

The next morning, however, when he was aroused from his short, heavy, and unhappy sleep, Stephens brought him, among other letters, one from his friend.

Derryman was in London, and suggested lunch at his club.

"I am awfully anxious to see you, dear old chap," he wrote. "Your letter was so mysterious. Fortunately, I was in town for a couple of days and just happened to get it. You say that something very strange has happened to you and as you write from another address, I am hoping that this strange something is good also. You might just telephone to say if you can be at the club. I leave for Ireland again to-morrow night."

Mr. Bryant instructed his valet to telephone through to the Naval and Military, and say that he would be there to meet Mr. Derryman at the time suggested.

His mood was calmer, his outlook less distorted in the morning, and as he turned over the various begging letters which formed the mass of his correspondence, that sense of power, which all men

love, crept into his veins and helped to restore him in his own eyes.

He resolved that his charity should not be given sparingly. He had suffered so much himself, he never intended to turn away any man or woman without going fully into their case and seeing where and how they could be helped.

As he ate his breakfast, Julian resolved to make his way to Mr. Pleydell's private residence. He loathed Tenderten, the man was a living reminder of all that he wanted to forget, for he was resolved to forget : yet, though he covered over the burning eagerness of his heart, he could not set aside altogether the clamouring of his conscience—Enid. He must know something about her, where she was, or what she was doing. How she was living.

There had been a girl on the stage the night before who was very like her. For an instant his heart had stood still, and then he had half risen in his seat to go round and claim her ; then he had seen his mistake, the girl on the stage only suggested Enid. His wife had been so different.

He ordered the car to be brought round, and he drove to Mr. Pleydell's modest home ; the house-keeper informed him that she expected her master within a week.

Julian went back and got into the car. There was still an hour or so to fill before he could meet Derryman.

He drove into Bond Street. The sensation of having money to spend was still very strange that he always hesitated before he entered a shop ; but Stephens had made many suggestions to him that morning, about various things he required, and he ordered lavishly, being waited upon with that obsequiousness which now characterised the manner of every one about him.

He dismissed the car and determined to walk slowly about until he could go to the club, and half-way down Bond Street he met Lady Ellen.

She wore the prettiest of gowns, and had a French bulldog trotting at her heels. She stopped him, holding out her hand.

"How nice to see you!" she said. "Do you know, I was just thinking about you? I wanted to ring you up and ask you which night would be convenient for you to dine with me; but I couldn't find your number in the telephone book, Mr. Bryant."

He coloured a little, and then he said:

"I don't think it is in the book, but it will be in later;" and then he gave her his address.

"Oh!" she said; "that is where that queer old Mrs. Marnock used to live. Do you know, I was always sorry for her? She seemed so lonely. Did you know her?"

Julian was now quite pale.

"Yes," he said. "I knew her, Lady Ellen. She left me her house; she left me all that I have."

"Now that was very nice of her," Lady Ellen said in her pretty, boyish way. "I read all about her will. Hadn't she pots of money? I don't remember seeing your name in the paper," she added.

"I wasn't mentioned in the will," said Mr. Bryant. "It was a special legacy, and no one knows anything about it excepting the lawyers and yourself."

"Do you want it to be a secret? Oh! I am awfully good at secrets," said Lady Ellen. Certainly this man did remind her of Adrian, and certainly also she did like him; he was very nice, and so good to look at, younger than Adrian and with two strong arms, not crippled like poor Adrian. "Were you in the army?" she asked him.

He hesitated an instant, and then told her in what regiment he had served.

"Oh! you mustn't mind my asking questions," Lady Ellen said. "I am awfully curious about people I like; and I like you, Mr. Bryant," she said, "because you are so like my cousin. I hope you'll meet Adrian one day; he is such a splendid man. I dare say you know him by name, Colonel Adrian Dawney. He was wounded in the Transvaal; but he got all sorts of honours."

"Indeed, I do know Colonel Dawney by name," Julian said warmly.

"Well, we are going to be friends, aren't we?" Lady Ellen held out her slim hand and smiled at him. "Do come and dine one evening. Are you fond of bridge? I think I could scrape up a party."

"I never touch cards," Bryant answered hurriedly, and then he added with a faint smile, "I am afraid I am really a very dull sort of individual, but I shall be delighted to dine, Lady Ellen. It is very good of you to ask me."

"Dull!" repeated Lady Ellen to herself as she walked on. "No, my dear man, you are not dull! How I wish you weren't so like Adrian!" she sighed. "Now, I suppose I must get somebody else to meet him, but who? Not Mr. Tenderten. I must just go home and think it out."

Bryant felt cheered by this little meeting with Lady Ellen Crooper; he liked her.

She had a very straightforward way of speaking, which appealed to him.

He had to wait a little while for his friend when he reached the club, and he sat pretending to read the papers. He was irritated with himself, in that he showed so little strength of will that he could not bring himself to find pleasure in his present condition; indeed, when Captain Derryman joined him, he found himself looking at Julian rather closely.

"I say, you must have had a bad time, old chap,"

he said. " You've grown a lot thinner than you were, and you hadn't too much flesh to be proud about when we met last."

" Yes, I have been going through a bad time," said Bryant; and then he smiled; " but I suppose I ought to ask for your congratulations, because when you saw me I was pretty nearly as low down as a man can be, and now"—he laughed—" well, now, I've got some money, more than I know what to do with."

" That sounds interesting," said Captain Derryman, as he led the way to luncheon. " How have you managed it, Julian ? "

" It has been a case of luck, a most unexpected thing to come my way."

" Well, I'm jolly glad, dear old chap. You always were one of the best, and you deserve all the good you can get. Tell me some more."

Julian Bryant very briefly gave him the story of his inheritance, of course, without any reference whatever to the condition attached to it.

" By Jove ! " said Captain Derryman. " You may well say that you are in luck. This is something worth having, isn't it ? Well, what are you going to do with yourself ? I don't think that you were intended to be an idler ; but," he added the next moment, " I dare say your wife has plans about your future ? "

" No," said Bryant. " I have to make my own plans." He laughed a curiously strained laugh, and then he said : " The fact is, my wife and I are not together. Things got so strained between us, she took herself out of my life. My God ! Derryman, you don't know what an ugly thing real downright poverty is ! "

" I'm sorry," Captain Derryman said. He paused an instant, and then added : " I don't mind confessing to you, Bryant, that more than once since I saw you I have found myself envying you. You told me so

much about your wife that I felt that whatever else was going wrong with you, at least one very great happiness was bestowed on you. Mrs. Bryant seemed to me just the sort of woman I've always wanted to meet."

"Don't change in that, Derryman, because it is the truth. I don't think there is another like her, but—" Julian stopped abruptly, and the other man very quickly turned the subject of the conversation.

He talked about all sorts of things, and never once again touched on Bryant's own personal matters.

In fact, they spent a very pleasant hour, and when Julian rose to go he did so reluctantly.

"I want you always to put up with me, Frank," he said, "whenever you are in town. I am sorry you are going away to-night."

"I promise to put in a few days with you before I go back to India," Captain Derryman said; "but why do you stay in town? What you want is change of scene, change of air, change of surroundings."

"I am just drifting," Bryant answered; and he spoke the truth. "I don't quite know what lies in the immediate future." Then he laughed that strange empty laugh. "Don't be surprised one day if you find me back in the gutter again."

"I'll tell you what," said Captain Derryman, "just make up your mind to come across to Ireland for a week or so with me. My people will be delighted to see you. I can promise you some good fishing, if the birds are not of the finest quality."

"I think I will come," said Bryant suddenly; "but I have a certain amount of business which I must attend to before I can leave town."

When he reached his home he ordered the touring car to be prepared, and intimated to his chauffeur that he would drive himself.

To Stephens, the imperturbable and the discreet, he said, as he got into the car :

"I am going for a long spin in the country. I don't quite know when I shall get back. Perhaps I shan't return to-night. I will telephone through."

"Yes, sir. I understand, sir. Won't you take Morten with you, sir? He'd be handy if anything was to go wrong, you know."

"I know all there is to know about a car," said Julian with his curious smile. "I don't want anybody with me."

It was almost like drifting back to the old hard-working days, to find himself steering his way out of the crowded streets towards the country. The fact of doing something, of having to occupy his mind and his hands, was very helpful. The sense of liberty, too, was agreeable, for though in one sense his nature responded to the luxury which surrounded him, he felt hampered and irritated by the presence of so many people watching and waiting upon him.

Mr. Tenderten called late that afternoon, and frowned slightly when he heard that Mr. Bryant was not likely to be home.

He had been a good deal upset by Julian's manner the night before, and it certainly was not his intention to let the young man treat him in so cavalier a fashion ; neither did Mr. Tenderten intend to let Julian Bryant be too independent ; however, in the present instance there was nothing to be done but to leave his card and to go away.

He made plans, however, as he went. His bill of costs should be heavy ; the unusual interest he had expended on Julian Bryant needed full payment.

"After all, he takes it very coolly," Edgar Tenderten said to himself ; "and if it hadn't been for me I wonder where he would have been? Pleydell would never have let him slide into the money so easily."

If he thinks that he can shake me off in this sort of way, he has made a great mistake!"

Julian Bryant was absent for twenty-four hours; but when he came back he felt and looked another man.

His housekeeper had expressed some doubts as to his capacity of driving his own car; but Stephens had dismissed this with a wave of his hand.

He was not going to give his master away, but he knew just sufficiently enough about Julian's former status to be aware that whatever else Mr. Bryant might fail in, at least in driving a car he was certainly the right man in the right place.

There were various letters awaiting, among them one in a very bold handwriting, bearing a coronet and carrying a delicate and delicious scent. It was from Lady Ellen Crooper, asking Mr. Bryant to dine with her quite unceremoniously that night.

"I do hope you are not engaged," she wrote. "I shall be so disappointed if you can't come. I rang up on the telephone this morning; but they told me that you were away, motoring. What a sensible thing to do! London is too dreary for words just now."

Julian sent round a note by hand to Lady Ellen's house, saying that he would be delighted to dine. He heard of Mr. Tenderten's visit with a contraction of his brows. He was not quite so dense as Edgar Tenderten imagined, for he had pretty shrewdly taken the measure of the other man, and he was quite convinced that Tenderten intended to get a good deal out of him.

One of his letters gave Julian no pleasure whatever. It was from his mother, mysteriously full of the extraordinary change in his circumstances, and who

naturally wrote to congratulate him and remind him that there were many, many things that he could do for her.

She announced that she was returning to England in about a month or six weeks' time, and she wrote a few rather harsh sentences about Enid, whose absence during his illness had been reported to her.

"I always knew, my darling, that your marriage was a great, great mistake. Of course, I did not want to impress this upon you too much ; but your wife should have been a different kind of woman ; and then you married so hurriedly. Look how she dragged you down, and all that you went through, poor dear."

Julian tore his mother's letter into a hundred pieces ; although he disliked doing so, he questioned Stephens.

"When I was ill," he asked abruptly. "Can you tell me if any one communicated with my mother ?"

Stephens hesitated a moment, and then said :

"Yes, sir. There was a time when you were so bad, sir, that it was thought necessary to let Mrs. Hembury know. It was Mr. Tenderten who wrote, sir ; he got her address from some letters which had been sent on from your former rooms."

"So my letters were opened ?" Mr. Bryant said hardly. "That seems a very curious thing."

"Well, sir," said Stephens, in his deprecating manner. "There wasn't no one to act for you except your lawyers, and as I said just now, sir, you was in a very bad way, sir, and—"

"And those letters that came, why were they not given to me when I was well enough to read them ?"

"I am sure I don't know, sir. I expect Mr. Tenderten could tell you."

Julian felt his heart beat almost painfully. He dismissed Stephens and went to dress, feeling that it

would give him the greatest satisfaction in the world to put his hands round Edgar Tenderten's throat and shake him like a rat !

" She must have written, and he stopped her letter." And then there came one of those phases of his humiliation.

" After all, I may regard him as a skunk ; but what does he think of me ? "

Lady Ellen was alone in her little drawing-room when Mr. Bryant was announced.

" I am so glad to see you," she said.

She looked more boyish than ever, for she had a trick of wearing her wavy hair on one side, and her gowns were always very simple and very young looking.

Julian knew of course that she must be somewhere about twenty-six or twenty-seven ; but she seemed much younger.

" My cousin is coming : she did not leave town, after all. You met her the other night, you know ; and then I have asked two men whom I think you will like ; and there is a girl coming who sings awfully well. I want you to be happy, Mr. Bryant, because then you will come back and see me many times."

" I should like to come whenever you ask me, Lady Ellen," Bryant answered.

She smiled at him. " You weren't out in South Africa at the time of the war, were you, Mr. Bryant ? " she queried a moment later.

Julian shook his head.

" No ; I had only just joined, worse luck ! I should have loved to have gone."

" Do you know why I asked you this ? It is because you have just the same sort of look in your face that Adrian Dawney has. You don't know how changed he is. Of course, he was fearfully knocked about

poor fellow ! He lost his left arm. But I don't believe it was that that changed him so much."

" War is a terrible experience, Lady Ellen ; and from what I know of what Colonel Dawney did, he must have gone through some awfully hard times."

" It all sounds so big and so wonderful," Lady Ellen sighed, and laughed at the same time. " You know I am always having hard times ; but my worries are so little, so very little, in comparison to what other people have to suffer. Ah ! here is Poppy."

That evening Julian Bryant was almost happy. It was certainly a very delightful experience for him. Lady Ellen had an indefinable charm, and the duchess was so kind, such a womanly woman. She seemed to take a great interest in him. After dinner, the girl about whom Lady Ellen had spoken, sang to them very sweetly, and Julian sat and listened with his eyes closed and his face set.

Lady Ellen whispered once to her cousin.

" It's too ridiculous, isn't it ? for, of course, he is younger, but I can almost believe at times that Adrian is here ! Don't you like him, Poppy ? "

" Very much," said the duchess. " I feel sorry for him," she added involuntarily, and Lady Ellen nodded her head.

" Yes, I know what you mean. I have the same feeling myself. Mr. Tenderten said the other night that Mr. Bryant is lonely, that he came unexpectedly into all his money, and he has no friends. Shall we be kind to him, Poppy ? "

The duchess looked at her young cousin with a little quizzical expression in her eyes.

" Sometimes there is danger in kindness," she said ; and Lady Ellen coloured slightly, but laughed and shrugged her shoulders.

" Oh, I don't mean to be dangerous ; but I do like him ; really and truly, I like him."

When she rose to go the duchess turned to Julian.

"If you have nothing better to do, Mr. Bryant," she said, "I shall be very glad if you will come down and stay the week end with us. We are in Kent just now. I have persuaded Lady Ellen to come. I think she needs a little change of air."

"You are very kind," Julian Bryant said. "Thank you very much. I shall be delighted to come."

Lady Ellen flitted up to them.

"Making plans?" she said.

"I have persuaded Mr. Bryant to come to us for a few days," the duchess said; then she added, "and you can motor down quite easily."

Bryant looked at Lady Ellen.

"Would you care to have my car?" he asked her: and she answered, "Yes, if you will drive me down yourself; but I must warn you that I shall take all sorts of packages with me. I am a terrible person when I travel, aren't I, Poppy?"

"Send your maid on with your luggage, and just motor down quietly with Mr. Bryant."

"It sounds delightful," said Lady Ellen; and she almost clapped her hands.

After all her guests had gone she sat down and wrote a letter to Colonel Dawney:

"I've got a new friend," she wrote, "a man! No, I am not going to flirt with him because he is so nice? And do you know why he is so nice? Because he is awfully like you; he reminds me of you in the most extraordinary way, both in look and in tone of voice and especially in his manner. His name is Bryant; and he has inherited a fortune from that queer old Mrs. Marnock, who died recently; evidently she must have been very fond of him, because she has left him all sorts of treasures besides money. I think you would like

Mr. Bryant. We are going to stay with Poppy this week-end. I wish you would come over whilst I am there. Good night, you nice, dear, cross Adrian.

“Ever yours,
“NELL.”

CHAPTER IX.

ON the whole, Enid Bryant got through the ordeal of her first public performance very well, all things considered. Her name figured in the programme as Miss Sinclair ; she hurriedly chose this name as one which had belonged to her aunt's family in Canada.

Manon Laurie asked no questions ; but she glanced casually and significantly at her new pianist's left hand on which the wedding-ring still gleamed, and Enid's first task, when she had been alone, had been to draw this precious ring off her finger and put it carefully away. When night time came, Enid was worn out, and yet when she was in bed at last, she could not sleep ; against all her courage the tears would come, and she wept bitterly and hopelessly.

It did not go so pleasantly with her the

second day. There had been very little money in the hall the night before, and the members of the concert party were one and all bad tempered and depressed.

When she saw Enid's white face and tear-stained eyes, Miss Laurie gave an emphatic shrug of her shoulders. She had no use for an ill person or one heavily troubled, and this sentiment was felt intuitively by Enid, who had already learnt the hard but necessary lesson that the world, as a rule, is too much occupied with its own affairs to give sympathy or be bored with sorrow.

A couple of hours' hard work at her piano did her good ; she resolutely put all torturing thought aside.

"I won't remember," she said to herself. And after all, there was joy to her to be back in the old groove of music, to feel ambition thrilling her once again, to be conscious of the delight of her own power, even to dream dreams of a future in which that power might carry her very far !

She played quite brilliantly on the second night, and was cheered and gratified by the praise of her companions.

The next day the little party moved on to another town, and after that, a hard time followed for Enid. They changed so frequently, and it was difficult to assist in the practical arrangements and go through all the work of a new programme, while at the same time she had to look for lodgings.

She found time, however, to scribble a few lines to Sybil Jackson, and to thank this good friend most gratefully for her practical help.

It was not until Enid had been away nearly three weeks, that Miss Jackson forwarded on Mr. Pleydell's letter. When she did so, she wrote a note of explanation :

"I hope I have not done wrong in keeping back

this letter ; but I have felt that it was going to upset you, and I didn't want anything to happen to make things harder for you than they are at present. You see, I am so afraid you might be tempted by the goodness of your heart to be called back to the life which you have had the courage and the proper spirit to leave."

Enid sat some time before she read Mr. Pleydell's letter, but at last opened the envelope. She quickly remembered the name of Pleydell as being one of those signed to that letter which had fallen out of Julian's pocket that bygone day.

The stiff, unsympathetic wording of this letter brought to the girl a fresh rush of unhappiness. Absolutely ignorant of all that was passing with Julian, wholly unconscious of his illness, naturally Enid saw in this communication from his lawyer, the one proof she had required to bring home to her the fact that by leaving him she had set him from herself for ever.

It would be hard to define the thoughts that had lain hidden, even from her own consciousness, during this time of hard work ; but sure it was, that deep down in the corners of her heart, hope had lurked, hope built on so many sweet memories, the hope that the man she loved, and whom she had believed had loved her, would have let all the money in the world go rather than have risked the loss of that love.

Instead of being angry with her friend for not forwarding on this letter, Enid was grateful to Sybil Jackson, for though it signified so much mental suffering to her now, it would have been infinitely harder to have read such a letter in the first days of her new existence.

She put it aside, and scribbled just a few kind words, pretending an indifference she was far from feeling.

"What I want you to realise, dear Sybil," she wrote, "is that work has done me all the good in the world! I am getting on splendidly, and as long as I have my music, I don't want anything else."

She certainly was much better in health and brighter in spirit; like Julian, when his turn came to face the situation, a certain touch of sophistry crept into Enid's nature. She tried to harden herself, even to sneer at what had been so beautiful.

"At least, I'm no longer a fool," she would say to herself. "I am doing something better than cooking and scrubbing floors for a man, who thought so little of me, that when the chance came of getting rid of me he seized that chance with both his hands!"

When she was not working at her piano, she took long walks. She was full of restless energy; to sit still, to sew, to read, were things beyond her. Miss Laurie wondered audibly at her activity.

"You will never get fat, that's certain," she said. Then she took Enid into her confidence. "I am awfully worried," she said. "Desmond Hammond is in a wretchedly bad temper because his songs go so badly."

Enid smiled faintly, then she said, "Well, that is Mr. Hammond's own fault. He sings so abominably!"

"Oh! for goodness' sake, don't say that out loud," Miss Laurie said, in great consternation. "If he were to hear you it would be all up with us!" Then she explained further. "My dear, we simply can't afford to let Hammond be upset because, you see, he is running this show. It was a really splendid bit of luck that threw him in my way. He is ever so well off, and will come into a good deal of money later on, and all he wants to do is to sing. I am afraid," Miss Laurie said suddenly, "you are the disturbing element."

"I am?" Enid said uneasily, and with a good deal of surprise.

"Yes, you get encores every performance: that makes our young friend sulky. If we don't do something, I am afraid that there will be an end to this little entertainment right away."

"Oh! then please cut me out of the programme," said Enid, her voice trembling a little.

The mere suggestion that the tour should come to an end before the appointed time made her heart beat nervously. She had no plans for the immediate future, for, deeply as she acknowledged her debt to Sybil Jackson, the mere thought of sharing her life indefinitely with this friend, sent a chill through her heart.

"Well, I am afraid you will have to stand on one side, at least for a night or two," Manon Laurie said; "he was just like a bear with a sore head last night when you had those two encores."

"I think Mr. Hammond is a very odious young man," Enid said, with some natural temper.

Miss Laurie shrugged her shoulders. But she was not unkind.

"I am ever so much obliged to you for working in with me," she said. "Lots of girls would have made it very disagreeable."

Enid laughed a pathetic little laugh.

"Well, it isn't just natural sweetness on my part. Unfortunately, I have to live, and I don't want the tour to end any more than you do."

Nevertheless this change in the arrangements was something of the nature of a blow to her, for her only moments of pleasure and real happiness and forgetfulness were those spent on the platform, letting her heart and her soul speak through her fingers.

She had taken a dislike to Desmond Hammond the

first time they had met. He was good-looking, but there was an aggressiveness in his manner, that ugly arrogance which money so often gives.

That same night her solos were withdrawn, and Miss Laurie, to help matters along, chose to sing two duets with Mr. Hammond, which, fortunately, were very well received.

The night was a wet one, and after the concert Enid stood a while at the side door of the hall. She had brought no umbrella, and it was a matter of great consideration to her that she should not get her clothes wet or spoilt. Manon Laurie had already gone, but Mr Hammond's motor-car, in which he travelled from town to town, was waiting, and he came out while Enid was standing in the doorway. He lifted his hat to her, and was passing on when he paused.

"You didn't play to-night," he said. "Why was that?"

She shrugged her shoulders.

"Oh! I wasn't in the mood."

The young man hesitated. He looked at the fair, pretty, delicate face, and was conscious once again of the extraordinary pride of this girl.

"I say, it is awfully wet; won't you let me take you home in the car?"

She shrank from him visibly.

"Oh, thank you—no—no!" and to emphasise her words she said "Good night," and almost ran out into the road.

Fortunately she was overtaken by the baritone, a pleasant man, no longer very young, and he insisted on sharing his umbrella with her.

The next day at rehearsal Mr. Hammond looked very keenly at Miss Sinclair. He had one or two new songs to try over, and he sang very badly, so badly that on one occasion Enid winced palpably.

With an angry sweep of his hand he picked up the song from the piano.

"I don't think I'll trouble you any more, Miss Sinclair," he said. "We are evidently not in sympathy."

Enid got up and pulled down her veil with hands that trembled a little.

Mr. Hammond had gone away from the piano, and now had come back again.

"Look here," he said. "Why don't you say, straight out, you think I'm a rotten bad singer?"

The colour flamed into Enid's face, and on the spur of the moment she answered :

"I will if it will make you sing any better."

He stared at her almost incredulously for a moment ; then he said in a choked voice :

"Thank you," and in an instant the realisation came to Enid of what she had done.

"Oh, please, please," she said ; "don't be cross. I only spoke in fun."

"I don't like your fun," he answered. He took up all his music and began slipping it into the handsome leather case he carried.

Enid felt a little sorry for him ; he was very young, and she felt that she had hurt him. After all, he was not quite to blame, since no one told him the truth, and then with a little pang at her heart she remembered Manon Laurie's words—what would happen ?

As he picked up his hat and gloves, she spoke again.

"Mr. Hammond!" He turned. "Please don't go. We must try those songs."

"I am not going to let you play for me any more," he said doggedly. "I know quite well you are making fun of me the whole time. Well, you can do that to somebody else. You shan't do it to me."

"You'll get me into no end of a bother," said Enid.

"That hardly concerns me," observed Mr. Hammond stiffly.

"But if I say I'm sorry, really sorry."

The hall was empty. Had any one of the others been present Enid could not have pleaded in this way. It hurt her as it was, but the anger of this young man carried so much that was threatening in it.

"What's the use of saying you're sorry, that won't help me to sing, will it?"

He had pulled off his gloves, and he put down his hat and stick.

"You know I am not quite such an ass as you think I am, Miss Sinclair. Ever since you came I have seen things differently, and I know you simply can't stick my singing. Now, that's the honest truth, isn't it?"

She smiled.

"After all, what does my opinion matter, Mr. Hammond? I am only a student, and students are proverbially stuck up, and think they know more than anybody else."

"You're no student," said Desmond Hammond. "You're an artist! When you play I feel"—he paused for an expressive phrase—"all lifted up," he said. Then he shrugged his shoulders. "Of course, I know perfectly well why you didn't play last night. It was because somebody told you I was jealous. Well, I am jealous, but not in that way! I want to do big things myself, but I don't want to stop other people doing them. I spoke to Miss Laurie this morning. I told her that you were to go back into the programme."

Some tears came into Enid's eyes, and now she felt truly sorry for having hurt his feelings.

"Thank you, Mr. Hammond," she said. "That was very good of you. Now won't you let us go over these songs again?"

He stood by the piano, looking at her, and his expression was moody.

"Oh, what's the use?" he said. "I shall never sing, shall I?"

She answered him promptly.

"Of course you would sing if you would work. To do big things we all have to work. You have a charming voice, and you only want a little help. May I show you what I mean?"

He paused an instant, and then he said emphatically, "Rather!" And he went to the chair where his case rested, and brought the music back.

Enid spent an hour over one song, showing him his mistakes, and suggesting where he could use his voice to the best advantage.

She flung herself into the work with all her heart, and they both felt that the first lesson had been most successful.

"How do you know so much?" inquired Mr. Hammond, as they got up to go. "You seem very young, and yet you are so awfully clever."

"I have only my music to live for," Enid answered him, hardly conscious of how much was confessed in the words.

They left the hall together, and he insisted, against her will, on escorting her back to her very modest lodgings.

Later in the afternoon, when Enid was resting with closed eyes, after vainly trying to read, the dingy maid of the house brought in a basket of lovely roses to which was attached Mr. Hammond's card.

Just for a few moments the beauty of the flowers delighted her, then she remembered with a pain when Julian had sent her roses for the first time, and this brought back other memories.

She looked pale and quieter than usual when she went down to the hall that night. She had heard

from Manon Laurie with regard to her solos, but had sent a little written message saying that she did not wish to play for a night or two.

Mr. Hammond's new song went splendidly, and Miss Laurie expressed amazement to Enid.

"Why, he is actually singing decently to-night ! What has happened ? Well, if we have a few more successes like to-night we shall be safe for a little while."

She hummed through a few bars of the song she was going to sing, and then she sighed. "Only, you know, Hammond won't stick on like this much longer. He wants to sing in London, and of course he'll do it. One can do anything with money."

"Oh, how I hate money !" Enid Bryant said so bitterly and so passionately that the other looked at her in some surprise.

"Well, I don't know enough about it to hate it," she said with a laugh.

Gradually Enid began to take real interest in her rehearsals with Mr. Hammond. She never definitely suggested teaching him, but he was her pupil, nevertheless, and he was far less difficult to teach than she had imagined.

She had thanked him very quietly for his roses, but just as quietly had asked him not to send her any more, and though they met daily and worked together seriously, Mr. Hammond found himself just as much a stranger to Miss Sinclair at the end of a fortnight as he had been at the beginning.

Perhaps Enid herself was the only one of the little company who was not aware of the fact that Mr. Hammond was regarding her with something more than ordinary interest.

And so the weeks went by, and the end of the tour was coming into sight ; the end when the little company of artists would separate and go their

different ways. And what way was Enid Bryant to go?

That was the question which confronted and oppressed her. To return to Canada was impossible. When she had married, she had cut herself away from her aunt, who was her only known relative, and though the wife of the governor (who had been instrumental in sending her to England) had written charmingly when Enid had thrown up her musical career, the girl knew that she had lost a friend: moreover, she did not want to go away from England. It was the place where she had known her great happiness, and she was bound by the sweetest ties of sentiment to the country where she had met the man she had loved. Nevertheless, she fretted terribly about her future.

"You look dreadfully ill," Manon Laurie said to her one day; "but really, how can one be well working in such hot weather and with such little result? I am quite ashamed each week when I have to go into the question of finance with Hammond, but he hasn't grumbled once, and I have you to thank for that, my dear! You have done him no end of good, not only with his singing but with himself, and yet you are not over kind to him, are you?"

At this Enid flushed quickly. She certainly was not too amiable to Mr. Hammond; but then she was afraid of showing him too much kindness although now she really liked him. He was so young, and had such kindly impulses, and then—well, she was only human, and it was very pleasant to have some one to think about her, take trouble for her, and generally want to care for her. Still, intuitively, she felt there was safety, and wisdom too, in the attitude she maintained. It became the custom now for Miss Laurie and Enid to travel from town to town in Mr. Hammond's car, and these journeys, for the most

part through beautiful country, carried an unconscious healing to Enid.

One hot, stuffy night Mr. Hammond brought a delightful invitation to the two girls.

"I say, you know, I've got an aunt who lives about thirty miles from here, and she has written and asked me to stay a week-end with her. I said I would if she would include you two in the invitation, and she has replied, saying that she will be awfully pleased to see you. Here are your invitations." He gave them each a little note.

Miss Laurie accepted without hesitation, but Enid drew back.

"I am awfully sorry," she said; "but I think I shall have to go to London this week-end."

Mr. Hammond's disappointment was so pronounced that when they were alone Manon Laurie went straight to the point.

"Enid, you are unkind to that boy!" she said. "Why won't you go? Of course, if you won't go, I can't. Do change your mind."

That settled the question, and at the end of the week they found themselves motoring to a charming old rectory, nestling among the trees, and surrounded by the most beautiful country.

A great yearning crept into Enid Bryant's aching heart as they came near to this home. If only she could bury herself in some such quiet corner of the earth as this, how beautiful life might still be!

Their hostess greeted them warmly and graciously, and embraced her nephew, of whom she was evidently very fond.

"Just in time for tea," she said, and she led the way across the lawn.

Her husband, the grey-haired rector, was chatting with a tall man who had his back to them as they approached.

As he heard his hostess's voice, this man turned, and just for an instant Enid Bryant stood still and her heart contracted suddenly with an exquisite sensation of joy and pain mingled, for it seemed to her that she was face to face with her husband! The next instant, however, she saw her mistake; though there was a pronounced likeness, this man was older than Julian; moreover, he had an empty coat sleeve pinned across his breast.

He was introduced as Colonel Dawney, and almost immediately he took his leave.

As he went, Mrs. Gresham, their hostess, told them a little about him.

"He is such a splendid man," she said; "and did such wonderful things in the South African war. Poor fellow, he was dreadfully wounded. You see he has lost an arm, so there is no more soldiering for him."

"Puts up near here, doesn't he?" queried Mr. Hammond.

"Yes, he has settled down as a farmer, and lives about six miles away. If you would care about it, we will go and see him to-morrow afternoon, and ask him to give us some tea."

Manon Laurie sat and chatted briskly, laughing and enjoying herself; but Mrs. Gresham was a little concerned about Miss Sinclair. She found her very pretty, but very delicate looking, and there was a sadness in her expression which hurt her to see.

CHAPTER X.

MR. TENDERTEM heard of Julian Bryant's visit to the Duchess of Wiltshire with the greatest displeasure. He was conscious of being hotly jealous, and he felt, too, a certain resentment creep into his feelings where Lady Ellen Crooper was concerned. He had already been of the greatest service to her (as a matter of fact, she would not have been able to go on without him), and yet she had never brought about an invitation for him from the Duchess of Wiltshire!

"This will about turn our young friend's head," he said to himself; "but, if he treats me to any nonsense, there shall be some plain speaking."

The question of Julian Bryant threatened to be irritating in more ways than one, for with the return of Mr. Pleydell to the office, Mr. Tenderten was called upon to go through some annoying moments. The fact being that, when he received no answer to his letter to Enid, Mr. Pleydell became honestly troubled.

He journeyed once again to the little flat where Sybil Jackson lived, but again with no result. Miss Jackson was out, and he learnt from the porter of the flats that her friend was still away, and there was no talk of her coming back. Mr. Pleydell would have very much liked to have met Enid, but he shrank a little from coming in contact with Julian Bryant. This was something that could not be avoided, however, and one evening, about a week after Julian's visit to the Wiltshires, Mr. Pleydell found himself walking to keep a dinner engagement with Mr. Bryant,

in the house to which he had gone so often when Rachel Marnock had been alive.

The two men met with apparent friendliness, though Mr. Pleydell felt a little awkward, and while the lawyer was still trying to frame some words in which to approach the subject which so burdened his heart, Julian Bryant set him at his ease.

"I am glad to see you again, Mr. Pleydell," he said, "for apart from the fact that there are many matters which I am anxious to discuss with you, there is something I want to say to you, and that is, that I beg that you will not at any time speak to me about all that happened before my illness. I remember that I entrusted you with a very important task. Well, now I relieve you of this. The die is cast, and I am not going to look backwards!"

He spoke so hardly, with such a grim note in his voice, that the other man frowned slightly.

"As you please, Mr. Bryant," he said, and he spoke coldly.

There was a little restraint between them after that, naturally; but it wore off by degrees, and they found themselves talking quite easily and pleasantly through dinner.

The points of business which Mr. Bryant had to discuss with his lawyer were chiefly concerned with investments and other details of his property.

"You have made a great many changes here," Mr. Pleydell said, looking about him; "but it was always a very charming house, and Mrs. Marnock had great knowledge of what was good in furniture and such like."

"Yes," said Bryant, with his faint smile. "I understand that this house is full of treasures. Lady Ellen Crooper and some other friends were dining with me here a night or two ago, and they were full of admiration for the china and the pictures; for myself,

I know very little about these things, and care less," he added, with a sigh.

Mr. Pleydell looked at him, this time sharply, and without a frown. He seemed to see a glimpse of the Julian Bryant with whom he had been brought in contact so strangely, a few months before. In that moment, he almost assured himself that the man was playing a part, and he understood that the part was a painful one to play.

The conversation reverted after this, and was kept strictly to business topics.

He had made a stipulation with Mr. Pleydell that all his business should be dealt with by the senior partner of the firm.

"Perhaps I oughtn't to speak so frankly," he had said, "but the truth is I don't care very much about Tenderten. He belongs to a class of man with which I never could pull."

Mr. Pleydell had looked at him sharply, and then had quietly agreed to what he proposed.

"I always acted for Mrs. Marnock," he said: "and I am quite prepared to work for you." Just before he had left the house he had said involuntarily to his host: "What do you think of doing with your life, Mr. Bryant? I don't fancy that you are cut out for an idle man."

Julian had shrugged his shoulders.

"I don't know."

The words had sounded as if they might have run a little differently. "I don't care," instead of "I don't know."

Mr. Pleydell thought about him a good deal as he walked homeward, and once again he had a sense of anger against his partner for the precipitate way in which he had acted.

"I don't believe this man is happy," he said to himself. "It will be interesting to watch the

development of this business. It certainly is a curious state of affairs."

This same night, as he sat alone, after Mr. Pleydell had left him, there came to Julian the sudden resolution that he would have to do something with his life, make some big interest ; and he remembered that, when he had been working at the garage, learning all there was to learn about a car, he had made friends with one of his fellow-workers, a young man called Ketch, a real Cockney product, impudent, humorous ; but full of pluck and, moreover, full of ideas.

Ketch had, in fact, confided to Bryant that he had thought out a very important improvement in the steering gear, just one of those very simple things which might have been thought of by dozens of people, but had never been utilised till now.

This little innovation would mean a tremendous economy in the question of tyres, and Bryant suddenly resolved to put Ketch's discovery to a practical experiment.

"I'll start him on one of my own machines first," he said ; "and then, if it goes, I'll get the thing patented and we'll set to work and manufacture cars of our own."

He felt quite excited, and wrote out a telegram to send early in the morning, to his former pal at the garage.

He was not quite sure where Ketch was living, but he thought it pretty certain that this message would reach the man in the course of the day. Sure enough about 10 o'clock the next day a taxi drove up to the door and the driver of it asked to speak to Mr. Bryant.

Julian's butler would have denied this request ; but Mr. Ketch stood his ground.

"Here, I suppose you can read," he said ; and he took from his pocket the telegram which he had

received and pushed it under the nose of the other man.

"See, I'm here because I'm wanted, so you just cut and run and take in my name."

Julian himself came forward. He had heard the little altercation at the door.

"It is all right," he said to the servant. "Mr. Ketch has come here to see me on business. I suppose your car will be all right standing there, Ketch."

Ketch grinned.

"I'd like to see the cove as would try to run away with it."

He took off his cap and smoothed his very smooth hair, with his hand roughened with work and blackened with grease.

"Had your breakfast?" asked Bryant, as he passed into the dining-room.

"I'd a cup of cawfee at seven. Was out on an early job this morning."

"Sit down," said Julian Bryant.

"Do you mean that?" asked Mr. Ketch, a little dubiously.

He was debating with himself whether he ought to say "Sir." There was such a change in Julian Bryant. He really hardly recognised his former pal in this good-looking, well-dressed man.

"Of course I mean it. Sit down and have something to eat. I've just finished breakfast; but they shall make you some fresh coffee, and you can have anything you like."

Ketch said something pretty strong under his breath; but he sat down a little clumsily and then looked at Julian.

"I've often wondered what had come to you," he said; "but blime me, if I ever supposed anything of this sort. It don't take much guessin' to see as you've evidently come into a fortune."

"Yes," said Bryant, "that is why I sent for you. Have you done anything about that little invention of yours?"

"No," said Ketch. "I've been waitin'."

A footman came in and took Mr. Bryant's orders for some breakfast to be brought at once.

"Yes, I've been waitin'," continued Ketch. "I believe in keeping one's tongue between one's teeth, Bryant, till one's got things shoved along a bit into shape. It don't do, you know, to take too many people into your confidence. There's such a balmy lot of thieves cutting round."

"Well, I'm not a thief," Julian Bryant said with a laugh, and suddenly he was silent. What else was he but a thief? A man who stood in a false position, a man who had stolen the best out of a woman's heart and life, and then left her to fight, perhaps even to go under?

He shivered, and turning, he walked to the window.

Ketch was looking at him curiously. He had always realised that Bryant was a cut above the rest of the men in the yard, and unconsciously he had tempered his friendship with a certain amount of respect. Now he felt just a little awkward.

"I wasn't thinking of you," he said clumsily, when he spoke. "I know you to be a straight chap, and now you have come into luck—well, I'm glad, d—d glad!"

The footman brought in fresh coffee and several silver dishes and placed them in front of Mr. Ketch.

There was an expression on the servant's face which did not escape the guest. He chuckled to himself as he poured out some coffee.

"Ain't too pleased to be standin' round doing things for a chap like me," he said. "Am I to help myself?"

"Yes," said Julian Bryant, leaving the window.

"Well, this is a bit of all right," said Ketch, as he promptly obeyed.

While he ate he looked about him.

"It don't seem human," he said, after a pause. "I've read a bit in my time, and I know that there's palaces and big places where kings and such like live, but this beats me. A little bit of a change for you, what? How'd you like to go back again to the old life, gettin' up at six, workin' in mud and grease and wet, and p'raps gettin' a shilling or two at the end of the day."

"You won't believe me, Ketch," said Bryant, "but I'd give all this, all I've got, and it's a great deal, to be back living under those very same conditions."

Mr. Ketch swallowed the coffee with a relish, and wiped his mouth with the back of his hand.

"If I can't do that," Bryant went on quickly, "I want to do something as near it as I can. I'm an idle man, Ketch, and I've too much time on my hands. I want to be busy. Can you leave your job and come and work for me?"

"You try me," said Ketch. "I suppose you've got a Johnny what drives for you?"

"Yes, and I must keep him on. He's a decent chap, and he's got a wife and two children. It wouldn't be fair to shunt him, especially as he has been looking after the cars before I came here?"

"But what's the idea, guv'nor? Me and him won't quarrel?" said Ketch, gently and generously.

"I'm going to let you experimentalise, and if your invention works out all right, well, we'll start a business of our own, Ketch."

"Do you mean that?" asked the man eagerly.

Bryant nodded his head.

"Yes. There is my hand on it."

They shook hands across the table, and Ketch went on eating.

Suddenly he put down his knife and fork ; and he looked at Julian.

" I can't hardly believe it," he said ; and his voice was not steady. " Of course, I've gone on kiddin' myself all this time that somethink would happen as would give me my chance ; but I don't believe right down in my 'eart I ever thought as the chance would come. I'm not the first 'as thought things out who go to the wall, and later on sees some blighter with more luck come along and do the very thing as I was burstin' to do. That's what gets me now !—it's come so unexpected. It don't seem real."

" It's real enough," said Bryant ; " and you needn't thank me, because if any service is rendered it's you who are doing it, not I."

" Have it your own way," said Ketch, and he laughed. " When do we make a start ? "

" Just as soon as we can. How are you fixed, Ketch ? "

" Well," said Ketch, after a pause. " P'raps I'd better work out the rest of the week. Suppose we say, I chuck this job on Saturday and begin along o' you on Monday. How'll that do ? "

" First rate ! " said Julian heartily. " I'm going to let you take one of my cars to pieces. It's a French make, and I believe you can fit your new adjustment on to it exactly." Then he put his hand into his pocket.

" Here's some money for you," he said, " if you want to buy any materials."

Ketch shook his head.

" No. I've got to earn my wages. And don't you go chuckin' your money about so free. You might lose it."

He took up his cap and walked to the door, and Bryant walked with him, his hand resting on the working-man's shoulder.

" That's settled, then ; you come on Monday." Then Ketch's expression suddenly changed.

" You know, sir," he said, " I've got a lot I'd like to say, but you'll have to took it for being said. I'm not one for words. I hope to God I'll be able to show you what stuff I'm made of before you're through with me."

He changed his voice suddenly.

" I'm glad you've come into money," he said. " You're the sort as ought to have it, and your lady's one of the right sort, too. Oh, I ain't forgot that night as you sent me round with a message to her, saying as you'd be late. She treated me like a gent, that she did. I'll be proud if you'll give her my respects."

" My wife is not here," Julian Bryant said very quietly. " I may as well tell you myself, before other people do. We are separated, Ketch. She—she left me."

The taxi-driver stared at him : something of a rough protest was hovering on his lips, but he did not speak the words, instead he said quite curtly :

" All right " ; and then he opened the door and went through the hall ; and a moment or two later they parted.

CHAPTER XI.

IT was strange, but a very charming experience for Enid to wake the next morning and look about her. The window was widely open, and the early morning sunshine was flooding the room.

It was a dainty little room, all white paint and pretty flowered chintz—the sort of room she had vaguely longed for.

From this corner of the house she had an uninterrupted view of the country beyond the Rectory grounds ; and her eyes filled with tears as she watched the sunlight glinting the trees, and felt the warm soft air, fragrant with flowers, steal through the window.

Mrs. Gresham, her hostess, had escorted her up to her room the night before ; in fact, she had insisted on Miss Sinclair going to bed early.

" You look so tired, my dear," she said. " Now won't you promise me to stay in bed to-morrow morning, and have a thorough rest ? Then if you feel equal to it, we will go over to Colonel Dawney's farm in the afternoon. I'm so glad you had no concert to-day. It gives you a longer week-end, doesn't it ? And the quiet here will do you good ; because," added Mrs. Gresham, with a faint smile, " we are very quiet here, especially on Sundays. I'm afraid that is why Desmond does not come to me as often as I should like."

Enid had promised to rest and have her breakfast sent up, but the morning sunshine tempted her, and she felt so much better that she got up, took her bath, and dressed, and then finding that she could reach

the garden by some iron steps from the terrace outside her window, she descended them.

Her unhappiness and her oppression slipped away from her almost entirely, as she wandered through the old-fashioned rectory garden.

After a while, she sat down on a rustic seat and watched a little brook that trickled through the grounds. It danced and shone in the sunlight, and it made a musical and gurgling sound as it fell over some loose pieces of stone. And as she sat there, some one leaped over the low boundary wall and came towards her.

Again, just for a moment, Enid Bryant started and shivered as she looked at this man ; though older, he certainly was very, very like Julian.

Colonel Dawney saw that almost frightened look in her eyes, and expressed regret for startling her.

"I'm so sorry, Miss Sinclair," he said. "I did not suppose I should find any of the Rectory party up, although Mrs. Gresham is always about early. The fact is, I had this salmon sent me from Scotland last night, and I thought I would bring it down to her. What she can't use herself, I know she would like to give to various people about here."

"Did you carry that huge fish all the way from your house ?" asked Enid.

He had put a long matting basket down on the ground.

He shook his head.

"No. I came by car ; it's out yonder. I thought I wouldn't rouse the household by driving up to the door, so I took my favourite short cut. No," he added, "that gentleman weighs just a little bit too much for me to carry more than a short distance. Is this your first visit to Mrs. Gresham ?"

Enid said : "Yes, it is very good of her to have me

I'm really a stranger to Mrs. Gresham's nephew, Mr. Hammond."

"I don't think he thinks so," said Colonel Dawney.

"May I sit down?"

"Please do," said Enid. Then she smiled. "I have a sort of idea that you would like to smoke, wouldn't you?"

He nodded his head.

"Yes. You really don't mind?"

"No; I'm used to smoking."

She coloured hotly after she had said this; but Colonel Dawney did not attach any significance to the words; if he had thought about them he would possibly have imagined that she meant that her father or a brother smoked constantly.

She longed to help him as she saw him take out his pipe and tobacco pouch; but he was so quick and deft with his one hand that to offer to assist would not only have been hurtful, but unnecessary.

As though guessing her thoughts, Adrian Dawney turned to her as he lit a match.

"I never cease to be thankful that it was my right arm that was spared, although I dare say I should have got along just as well with the other one. It is wonderful what we can do when we try, isn't it?"

"Yes," said Enid, "wonderful!"

She was thinking to herself, and, realising how much harder his burden was, in a sense, than her own.

"I hope you don't mind a pipe. I can't get used to cigarettes, and a cigar is an after-dinner affair."

"I like a pipe," she answered him. "It's so homely. Mrs. Gresham is going to ask you to give us tea this afternoon," she added.

"That's good. I should like to show you my little home. I always hated towns and big cities—the country for me. Don't you love it?"

"Yes," said Enid. "But we can't always have things we love, Colonel Dawney."

"No; that's true." He smoked in silence for a minute or two, and then he said :

"Are you rested? I thought you looked tired out when you came yesterday. Young Hammond says that you work so hard."

"One must work if one wants to do anything."

"Has he got any talent?"

Enid paused before answering, and then she said :

"Not real talent; but he has a very pretty voice, and he has improved very much."

"They ought to have put him into the army," said Dawney. "He is a good boy, but all this artistic business is wrong."

At that very moment, Desmond Hammond himself came into view, dressed in immaculate white flannels, and with a towel slung over his shoulder.

"Hullo! Dawney, you're an early bird," he said; and then his expression changed and he coloured hotly as he saw Enid. "Good morning," he said. "You are up early! I thought you were going to stay in bed for breakfast."

"I didn't feel like it," said Enid, as she shook hands with him. "The sunshine tempted me, and I had to come out."

"I say, I wish I'd known. I've been mooning around and wondering when some one would wake up."

"Had your swim?" asked Colonel Dawney.

"No; I was just going to the river."

"Well, don't let us keep you."

Mr. Hammond made no reply, but he kicked the long matting bag on the ground. "What's this?" he asked.

"Fish for a good little boy; and if you like you can carry it to the kitchen. It weighs very nearly eighteen pounds."

"One of the gardeners can do that," said Hammond, rather coldly.

Colonel Dawney got up; and with a faint smile held out his hand to Enid.

"Well, au revoir, Miss Sinclair. I shall look forward to seeing you this afternoon."

"Aren't you going to stay to breakfast?" asked the other man, trying to put some civility into his tone.

"No; I must get back. Just tell Mrs. Gresham I thought she would like that salmon."

"Good chap that!" said Desmond Hammond, as they sat down on the bench and watched the tall figure leap the wall lightly and disappear out of sight.

"I should think he must be a splendid man," said Enid.

"All the women are mad about him. I suppose that's because he got mauled about in the war. I don't call him very handsome."

Enid smiled as she looked on the expression of the face beside her. Then she got up.

"Shall I help you carry this salmon to the house?"

"What an idea!" exclaimed Mr. Hammond. "We will leave it there. I'll send some one for it."

He was looking at Enid with undisguised admiration in his eyes. He had never seen her as she was this morning. She looked young, a mere girl. The expression in Hammond's eyes brought the colour rushing to her face.

"Do you know, I really think we ought to have a shot at it ourselves," she said. "I'm awfully strong. You take one end and I'll take the other."

He had to obey her, and they carried the big fish through the wooded part of the grounds back to the gardens.

Mrs. Gresham was standing at the door reading

her letters as she saw them coming across the lawn.

She scolded Enid while she kissed her.

"You are a naughty child!" she said. "I was just preparing your breakfast tray. Miss Laurie is more obedient. She is doing as I told her. What is that, Desmond—a fish? Colonel Dawney is much too good to me. He is always bringing me something. Why didn't you ask him to stay to breakfast?"

"He wouldn't," said Hammond.

"He couldn't," said Enid. "He seems a very busy man," she added.

"He does most of the work himself," Mrs. Gresham said; "but I don't pity him, for I am sure that makes him contented."

"I want to see his farm. I am so glad we are going there this afternoon," Enid said.

Young Hammond, however, did not seem to share this satisfaction. He grumbled a little, in fact, because he had made other arrangements for his aunt's guests. But no one took very much notice about his bad temper; in fact, here in this very homely place, with its village interests and peaceful atmosphere, he was very much less important than he was when with the members of the concert party.

"You see," Mrs. Gresham confided to Enid, when they went into the garden after breakfast together, "the boy has been spoilt from the very beginning. My sister lost her first three children, and Desmond is all that is left to her. Naturally, therefore, nothing is too good for him, and if he had not really an extremely nice nature, he would have become detestable by this time; but his heart's in the right place, and in a little while I believe he will get tired of wandering in these artistic grooves, where he has no proper place, and will settle down to the work which he ought to be doing in his father's office. I must confess that I am

very fond of Desmond. I don't see half enough of him."

Enid would have preferred to discuss Colonel Dawney, to whom she had been at once attracted ; but she saw that it was a pleasure to her hostess to talk about Desmond Hammond, and so she listened patiently. But as the day passed, and she was thrown very much into the society of this young man, there stole into Enid's heart a little feeling of regret and even of uneasiness. Without being in the least degree vain, she could not now disguise from herself the fact that she was something more than a passing attraction for young Hammond, and the mere suggestion of this was painful and disturbing.

It struck her, too, that Manon Laurie, a little mischievously, was encouraging the young man, not so much for a politic reason now, for in any case the tour was coming to an end, but because she honestly believed she was doing Enid a very good turn.

The prospect roused by this new turn in her life put a thrill of fear into the heart of Julian Bryant's wife, as she sat and made her plans for the future. It would be easy enough perhaps, to dispose of Desmond Hammond, but how could she protect herself in the future ? The life she had chosen, the only life she could choose was one which would almost inevitably bring her into intimate contact with the admiration of men.

Sitting alone, after lunch, in the delightful room allotted to her, she felt ashamed. She saw at once, that Mrs. Gresham had taken a decided liking to her. The Rector, too, treated her as though she were a young girl. The thought that she was obliged to deny her marriage, to hide her wedding ring, to seem in truth what she was not, really was revolting to Enid !

" After all," she said to herself, between her teeth, " I think I shall have to go out of England ! It will

be very, very hard, but not so hard as living on here as I shall have to live."

She practically decided that she would leave the tour immediately. This would mean that she would have to go back to Sybil Jackson, at least for a little while. And somehow she felt safe with Sybil. Miss Jackson was very matter-of-fact, very practical, very unsentimental. On the other hand, Manon Laurie was much more sympathetic; but now Enid could not shut her eyes to the fact that this friend, from the kindest motives, might prove the means of adding to Enid's burden of care.

She pleaded a headache when they started to drive in Mr. Hammond's car to Colonel Dawney's farm; and she looked so pale, with dark shadows around her eyes, that the plea seemed fully justified.

Mr. Hammond had arranged to drive himself, and Miss Sinclair was given the seat beside him, but Enid was a silent companion. It gave the young man, nevertheless, an immense amount of pleasure to feel that she was near him, and that she was already a favourite with his uncle and his aunt. He would not let himself be disheartened by the almost open way in which Enid shirked anything like a confidential intimacy between them.

"I am going home next week," he said to her suddenly, just before he turned the motor into the road in which Colonel Dawney's farm was situated, "and I am awfully keen for you to come and stay with my mother, Miss Sinclair. My people have taken a house near Felixstowe for the summer. It would be such a good thing for you to have a long rest there."

Enid looked at him, nervously.

"I am awfully sorry," she said. "I am afraid I shall not be able to go to your mother. I have a great deal of business that will keep me in town, and then," she shrugged her shoulders, "I think it is

very probable that I shall have to go to Canada in the early autumn."

"Canada!" said young Hammond. He looked very much upset for a moment; then his face lit up. "By Jove! What a splendid idea. I've always wanted to go to Canada."

To this Enid could say nothing, but she felt wretched. The difficulties were getting a little bigger. She began to wish that her visit to the Rectory could come to an end at once.

Colonel Dawney was standing at the top of a large field, which stretched in front of the low-roofed, old-fashioned house where he lived.

"You had better take the car round there, Hammond," he said, indicating a road to the right a little higher up. "You'll jolt your springs to pieces if you attempt to come down this way."

CHAPTER XII.

HE smiled as he shook hands with his guests, and he apologise^d for the roughness of the path.

"If you had given me a little time, Mrs. Gresham," he said, "I might have got this rolled out a bit; but you must just take me as I am."

"Isn't it sweet here?" said Manon Laurie, slipping her hand through Enid's arm and drawing her on to the rough grass. "We must fill our lungs with as much air as possible, then we shall startle the natives by our wonderful singing on Monday night."

Enid bit her lip, and then plucked up her courage.

"Do you know, Manon dear, I am afraid I shan't be able to go on with you when we leave here, on Monday morning."

Miss Laurie looked at her sharply and frowned.

"Oh!" she said, a little coldly. "Why?"

They walked on in silence for a moment or two. Mrs. Gresham had taken Colonel Dawney's arm and was moving slowly down the path; the two girls branched off across the field, and were now some distance away.

"Look here, Enid," Manon Laurie said suddenly, "I dare say you'll think me an impertinent cat; but the fact is that I tumbled at once to the truth about you. I mean that I saw that you are breaking your heart about some one or something, and, it seems to me, you want some one to take you in hand and make things straight for you. You don't know me very well, but, still, you do know me, I think, well enough

to be sure that I'd do my very best to help you. Wouldn't it do you good to speak out?"

There were tears in Enid's eyes, tears that rolled down her cheeks.

"I'm awfully grateful to you," she said; "and if I could tell you my trouble, believe me I would. I am going to ask you to do something for me, all the same," she said. She paused a moment, then, as she quickly brushed the tears away from her eyes, she said: "Don't—put wrong ideas into Mr. Hammond's mind."

Manon Laurie laughed a little sharply.

"My dear," she said, "I've put no ideas into his head. Why, it wasn't a week ago that I told him quite plainly I didn't think he had a ghost of a chance; all the same, Enid," she added the next moment, "I think you ought to pause before you send him right out of your life. He really is a decent boy, and, there is no doubt about it, he is head over ears in love with you."

Enid said nothing, and the other girl, glancing at her suddenly, saw such a white, strained look on her face that it gave her a pang of regret.

"I say, Enid," she said, standing still suddenly. "Don't look like that. Surely it isn't such a dreadful thing, is it, that Desmond Hammond should be in love with you?"

"It hurts me," said Enid, "hurts me in a way I can't explain. It is just because he is nice, and I know now he has such a good heart, that—that this thing does hurt so much. Now you'll understand, Manon dear, why—why I must leave the tour."

"But what are you going to do?" asked Miss Laurie, and now she spoke gently. "You've let me see that money is most necessary to you. Oh! of course we shall be able to manage somehow without

you, although it would be difficult ; but I am not thinking so much about myself."

" We can't talk this out now," Enid said hurriedly, for at that moment they were hailed from behind by Mr. Hammond ; " but we must arrange something before we go away from this visit."

" How's the headache ? Is it any better ? " asked the young man, eagerly, as he joined them.

" I am afraid it isn't very well," Miss Laurie answered promptly ; " but if Enid does nothing but just rests in a chair in that dear old garden which I see in the distance, I dare say she'll be all right by dinner time."

Mr. Hammond was full of concern. He suggested fetching all kinds of remedies, and he was still discussing the subject when Colonel Dawney and Mrs. Gresham joined them.

" A headache," said Colonel Dawney, glancing at Enid's white face, and instantly comprehending that she was really suffering. " I think I can cure it, Miss Sinclair. I'm no end of a good doctor, you know ; had to be when I was out for months at a time in wild parts of the world. I prescribe half an hour's rest for you Will you come with me ? "

He led her in through the low porch, and Mrs. Gresham, obeying an instinct which she could hardly define, slipped her hand through her nephew's arm, and with Miss Laurie turned in the direction of the garden.

Colonel Dawney took Enid through a long, broad passage into a low-roofed room. It was furnished in the simplest way possible, yet it had a great charm about it.

Colonel Dawney pushed the long couch up to one of the open windows.

" Take off your hat," he suggested. He went

out of the room, but was back again almost directly with two pillows under his one arm and a glass containing some liquid in his hand. "You see, I have no cushions," he said, "being a mere man; but my housekeeper and general factotum declares these pillows are the best in the world."

Enid was thrilling from head to foot. She let him take away her hat and veil and the loose cloak she had worn in the car. It seemed to her just as if Julian himself were ministering to her, even in his voice she could trace a resemblance.

"Must I drink all this?" she asked him in a low voice, and he nodded his head.

"Yes, every drop. Then I am going to arrange you."

He put her down on the couch, placed one pillow under her back and one under her head. "Now just close your eyes and don't think about anything," he commanded.

With the faintest of faint smiles, Enid obeyed him. He stood for a moment looking down on her with something like a frown contracting his brows. He was drawn to her irresistibly.

"This is no mere ordinary headache," he said to himself. He was accustomed to read faces, and to make quick judgments, and he told himself now that what had been surmise on his part that morning was undoubtedly the truth, and that this delicate young creature was fighting some mental trouble which threatened to overwhelm her.

He drew down the blinds very quietly, and went out into the garden to join the others.

"Miss Sinclair will be better when she wakes up," he said.

Desmond Hammond was not in a good temper. He confided to Miss Laurie that Dawney was no

end of a good chap of course, but just a little bit too masterful.

"Wants to rule everybody as he ruled the natives," he said; but Manon Laurie could find no fault with their host. "I think he is just splendid," she said.

She did not intend to have any intimate conversation with Hammond, for she was convinced that the young man would want to discuss Enid and nothing else; and now that the silence had been broken down between them, and Enid had let her see that this young man's intentions, instead of signifying happiness to her, meant quite the reverse, Manon Laurie felt that the position was one which required the greatest possible tact. So she joined Colonel Dawney and Mrs. Gresham, and they all chatted on general subjects till tea was brought out to them.

Colonel Dawney went himself to fetch Enid. He found her, not asleep, but walking about the room, looking at the various interesting things he had brought back with him.

"I felt so much better, I got up," she said. "What wonderful stuff that was! I think I shall have to get you to give me the prescription."

"You ought not to have many headaches," Dawney answered her.

"It has been so hot just lately, otherwise I'm always well," Enid said hurriedly. "Is tea ready? Oh, then, I'll come."

As she picked up her hat, she said: "What a charming face this is! She looks as if she had such a happy heart!"

It was a photograph of Lady Ellen Crooper, and it was certainly a happy picture.

"That is a kinswoman of mine. She is a widow."

"A widow!" repeated Enid. "Why, I thought she was just a schoolgirl."

"She is far more like a schoolboy," Colonel Dawney said with a smile. "We are great friends, Nell and I; although I see very little of her. She is always promising to rush down here and stay a little while; but she loves towns, and I'm afraid the country would bore her." He amended this with his next words. "Not that Nell is ever easily bored. That is one of her charms, she can always find sunshine wherever she goes."

"She is lucky!" said Enid. In the next breath she added—"There is nothing I should like better than to live in such a place as this! How quiet it is. How far, far away everything seems!"

"It's a little bleak in the winter, and decidedly dull," said Colonel Dawney, but Enid only laughed her faint laugh.

"Oh! I shou'dn't mind that. I'm used to real cold, hard, wintry weather. I believe," she added in a low voice, "I like the winter better than the summer."

"To me," Adrian Dawney said, "the spring is the most beautiful part of the year; and it is beautiful down here, when all the fruit trees are beginning to put out their white blossoms, and the little lambs are frisking about in the orchards. You ought to know all about that," he added, "for you are in the springtime of life."

Her lips quivered; but she said nothing, and they walked through the garden in silence.

Mrs. Gresham put out her hand and drew Enid down on the seat beside her.

"I—I am never so happy as when I am taking care of somebody," she said; "and I have a strong desire to take care of you. Miss Laurie tells me that you have to go to London on Monday. I wish instead, you would change your plans and stay with me."

"I wish I could," said Enid; "but I am so sorry it isn't possible."

She made a determined effort to drive off the shadows; although she knew that this was only a passing spell of peace and pleasure, she told herself that she would take the full advantage of it. Now that she had spoken to Manon Laurie, her heart was a little easier, for she was sure that the other girl would work in with her, and truly she did not want to give young Hammond any real cause for unhappiness.

"He has known me such a little while," she mused, as later on she strolled through the orchards with Mrs. Gresham. "He can't really care about me. It is only a fancy: he is very young, and we have been thrown together rather closely; if I disappear he'll soon forget all about me."

Mrs. Gresham insisted on Colonel Dawney joining them for dinner that evening.

He agreed willingly, because Manon Laurie and Enid had both promised to arrange some music for after dinner.

Just as they were strolling up to the top where Desmond Hammond was waiting with the car, another motor appeared on the road, and, to Colonel Dawney's surprise, drew up also at his gate.

"Some one to visit you," said Mrs. Gresham.

"I expect no one," he answered; but as a tall, slim figure got out of the car and stood a while chatting with Mr. Hammond, he smiled. "It's Nell," he said. "I suppose she must be putting up somewhere round here for the week-end. Now, Miss Sinclair, you will see the original of the photograph you admired so much."

Lady Ellen came towards them swiftly. She was all in white, and her piquante face, swathed about

with the soft folds of a motor-veil, looked deliciously pretty and very young.

"Here I am," she called out. "I told you I should take you by surprise." Then she laughed. "Adrian, you're a fraud! I've been picturing you in solitude with only cows and pigs and ducks, and here you are giving tea parties and surrounding yourself with beauty."

She shook hands with the three other women and Enid felt quite dazzled by the fascinating vitality of this young creature. The photograph had charmed her, but the original was far more delightful.

"I've come to take you back with me," she declared, turning to Colonel Dawney. "I'm staying with the Melmerbeys, and Grace Melmerbey told me that I was not to come back without you."

"Sorry," said Dawney: "but you are just a little late. I am promised for dinner to-night."

A look of real disappointment flashed into Lady Ellen's face, although she laughed.

"Worse and worse," she said. "I shall never believe in you and your farmyard again!"

They had reached the top by this time, and Miss Gresham was getting into the car. She looked from Lady Ellen to Dawney.

"Colonel Dawney is coming to dine with us," she said; "but—"

"Oh! I am not going to break my engagement," the man said quickly. "I've been promised music, you know, and that is a great temptation."

"And I can only offer you bridge and billiards, scandal and perhaps a kick-up of a dance."

As she spoke, Lady Ellen was looking at Enid. Like every one else, she was struck by the undoubtedly physical delicacy of the girl, but equally by her beauty.

She dismissed Manon Laurie as being handsome,

but rather common-looking ; but Enid was quite a different affair.

" Which is the girl who sings ? " she asked Colonel Dawney, as, the car having disappeared from sight, they turned to go down to the house.

" I really don't know," Colonel Dawney said. " They are artists with whom young Hammond has been travelling, and he got his aunt to invite them down here for the week end."

" That fair one is awfully pretty, isn't she Adrian ? "

" I suppose she is," the man answered.

" How do you mean, you suppose she is ? " queried Lady Ellen, with rather a strained note in her voice.

" Well, to tell you the truth I have hardly realised what she looks like. I am so struck by the fact that she is young, a mere girl, who seems to be breaking her heart for some reason or other."

Lady Ellen laughed.

" Sentimental Adrian ! " she said. " Don't you know that women's hearts are not made to break nowadays."

" I fancy women are very much the same as they used to be in every age. The conditions of life have changed enormously, that's true enough ; but human nature is the same old human nature of centuries."

Lady Ellen slipped her hand through his arm.

" You don't know how much I wanted you to come back with me, Adrian," she said. " If you hadn't accepted to dine at the Rectory, you would have come, wouldn't you ? "

He shook his head.

" I don't think so, Nell. I never very much cared for the Melmerbey lot."

" Does that mean that you don't approve of my staying there ? "

He smiled at her gravely.

"My dear," he said, "I can't pretend to dictate to you what you should do or what you shouldn't do."

Lady Ellen kicked up the rough path with her dainty foot.

"Well, I wish you would," she said, just like a child. "I'd be ever so much happier if I had somebody to give me orders and make me do things. I know I must get into mischief if I don't have some one to look after me."

"I thought the duchess was doing that very thoroughly."

Lady Ellen shrugged her shoulders.

"Oh! I am only a little bit of Poppy's life. She has so many other interests. Of course, I know she cares for me, but she can't be always worrying about me, can she?" Then Lady Ellen paused and looked about her. "Oh! Adrian, it's sweet here. It's a dream of a place. What a lovely air. I believe I should always be happy if I lived here."

At this Adrian Dawney laughed almost happily.

"Dear child," he said. "You'd love it for a day, well, perhaps a week, and then after that you'd want Bond Street, and a dinner at the Ritz, and a theatre. You'd find it so dull."

"Adrian," Ellen Crooper said, and there was a curious note of depth in her voice. "You always make me feel as if I were such a worthless piece of goods."

"That's the very last impression I want to make," the man said, very quickly. "But come in and let me give you some tea. You are not in a hurry to go back, are you, Nell?"

"I don't want to go back at all," she answered him, "now that you won't go back. I wish Mrs. Gresham, her name is Gresham, isn't it? Would have asked me to dine there to-night."

"Come along," said Colonel Dawney. He stretched out his one hand and led her to the house. When she was in the drawing-room and saw that her picture was in the place of honour, she ran up to it and clapped her hands delightedly.

"Oh! that is dear of you," she said. "I—I'm fearfully flattered at being here, and all by myself, too, no other photographs. That shows you do think about me a little bit."

Dawney had walked to the window and was putting up the blinds a little nervously.

"Why shouldn't I think about you?"

"I don't know," she answered, and then she sighed. "Look here, can I make up some excuse and say that I have got to go away to-night, then—then I can come and stay here, couldn't I? You'd have room made for me, wouldn't you?"

"I'm sorry, my dear, but it isn't possible," he spoke almost curtly. "I've no accommodation here, at least not without a good deal of preparation, and you can't play fast and loose with your friends in this fashion, you know. What would Lady Melmerbey think?"

"I suppose I can't," said Lady Ellen; and she looked at him very dismally. "How I do wish I hadn't accepted Grace's invitation. I—I know perfectly well why she asked me. It was because she thought she would get hold of Mr. Bryant, too. She is crazy about him, and in her stupid way imagines I carry him about in my pocket."

Colonel Dawney's fine brows contracted in a frown.

"Now, then, make yourself at home," he said, "and I'll get you some tea. Go and sit in the garden, I'll come to you there."

"Is this where you sleep?" asked Lady Ellen,

as she was passing out. She pointed to the couch on which the two white pillows rested.

He shook his head.

"No ; I brought those down because Miss Sinclair was so ill, I made her lie down for a little while."

This time it was Lady Ellen who frowned. She said nothing, but bit her lip, and went out into the garden.

Colonel Dawney interviewed his housekeeper once again, and before he joined Ellen, he stood watching her as she threw herself into one of the chairs.

There was an expression on his face which, had it been seen by Ellen Crooper, might have thrown a sudden enlightenment on much which perplexed and troubled her. Certainly, if Enid Bryant had seen him with that look on his face, she would have understood what the man had hardly, as yet, dared to confess to himself !

CHAPTER XIII.

WHEN Colonel Dawney reached the Rectory that night he met with one disappointment.

Mrs Gresham told him that Miss Sinclair was so very unwell that she had persuaded her to stay in bed.

"She fainted just a little while ago. I am really quite anxious about her," she added, "for she seems to me to be far too delicate for this kind of travelling life. From what I gather, she seems to be very much alone in the world."

"Pity she can't stay down here. This air would set her up again."

Then Colonel Dawney brought a smile of pleasure to Mrs. Gresham's face by telling her that Lady Ellen had been so eager to join her party that evening.

"Oh, I wish she could have come," the Rector's wife said. "She is charming, and looks so young."

"Well, she is young," replied Adrian Dawney, "and she has had a pretty rough time, poor Nell!"

It was, after all, rather a quiet dinner party. Desmond Hammond was decidedly out of temper. Manon Laurie flung herself into the breach, and did all she could; but the young man refused to sing, and as she candidly confessed she was not much good at playing her own accompaniments, the musical part of the evening was not a success. Twice Miss Laurie stole upstairs to see how Enid was.

Truth to tell, she had had a great shock when Enid had fainted.

"They are all so kind," she said, as she perched

herself for a moment on the bed for a little chat
“Mrs. Gresham is coming up to see you just before
you settle down. Colonel Dawney has sent you
the prescription of the stuff he gave you this afternoon.
What a nice man, Enid. I think he is too fascinating.”
Then Miss Laurie laughed. “That silly boy! I
believe he is jealous of Colonel Dawney.”

Enid lay on her pillows and listened. She did
not feel strong enough to talk; but later when Manon
Laurie had left her, she got up and went and sat
by the window.

Only one day more in this quiet and lovely haven,
and then the hard world, again, with all its hardships,
and all its bitterness!

As she sat by the window, Colonel Dawney and
the Rector came out of the drawing-room and walked
across the lawn. They were smoking and chatting.
Enid looked down at the tall soldier figure, and once
when he laughed, her face contracted. It was
horrible how like he was to Julian! She wondered
half vaguely, half passionately, whether this man,
who bore so strong a resemblance to her husband,
would have been capable of the same cruelty as
Julian? For, after all, now she did not disguise
from herself the fact that Julian Bryant was treating
her cruelly, and that money, and all that money
meant, had taken such a grip of him that it was
apparently nothing one way or the other to him,
what happened to her!

She suddenly broke into tears, and she cried for
a long time. Then she got up and leaned her aching
head against the long window, and as she stood there
Colonel Dawney came up from the bottom of the
garden alone. He had accompanied the Rector
(who had been called to the village) as far as the
lower gate. As he saw that white face and slim
figure standing in the soft moonlight, Colonel Dawney

paused, crossed the lawn, and came and stood quite close under the window.

"Are you better?" he asked, in a soft but clear voice.

Enid drew back for an instant, and then she stepped out on the balcony.

"No," she answered nervously. "I'm not very well. My head is so bad and I can't sleep."

"Poor little girl!" said Dawney. "I brought over some of that powder with me in case you should require it. I'll send it up to you by Mrs. Gresham. I have already given her the prescription."

"Thank you," said Enid. "You are kind."

"I wish I could be really kind," Adrian Dawney said. He still spoke in a low voice; he did not want others to notice him. "Now, look here, Miss Sinclair," he said. "We have only just met, and of course you can't know very much about me; but—Well! I'm a fairly decent sort of chap, and I should like to feel that you would turn to me and let me be a friend if at any time you had need of one."

"I have no friends," said Enid.

"Then, all the more chance for me," Dawney answered briskly. "Now, I can see quite plainly that you are worrying about something. If it is something you can't tell me, do let me urge you to make a confidante of Mrs. Gresham. She is the best and sweetest woman in the world, and she has already lost her heart to you."

"There are some things," Enid said in her tremulous voice, "that one can't tell."

His brows contracted for an instant, and then he laughed.

"Ah! how young you are!" he said. "All your little troubles seem heavy sorrows. But—really, I don't like to think of you fretting and worrying

when some of us could help you. Do think it over. Promise me to take the medicine and go to sleep. Make up your mind, and you will sleep! To-morrow I'm coming over to have a long talk with you. Good night."

She said "Good night" in a whisper, but it reached his ears, and the tears came again as she turned back into the room; the kindness, and especially such kindness as his, touched her very, very deeply.

When Mrs. Gresham came up about half an hour later, she found Enid in bed again, and pretended not to see the tearstains on the pretty face.

"By Colonel Dawney's orders," she said, as she held out the little glass; "and I want you to do me a favour, dear child; please stay here and take all the rest you can to-morrow."

"I promise," Enid said.

She swallowed the dose in the little glass, and then she held up her lips, and Mrs. Gresham bent and kissed her just as if they had been mother and daughter.

Lady Ellen Crooper's first act when she returned to London was to call at Mr. Bryant's. He had told her a day or so before that he had no intention of going away for any length of period this summer; and he had let her understand that he was busy; but he did not explain what his work was.

It was with a little thrill of disappointment that she heard that Julian was away from home. His butler added that he really had no idea when his master would return.

"Mr. Bryant's movements are so very uncertain, my lady," he said. "We are not even forwarding on letters; but sometimes Mr. Bryant sends up and collects them, or calls himself."

"Oh! I see," said Lady Ellen. "Thank you." She sighed once or twice as she walked away. She was dreadfully depressed.

She hardly knew what had taken her to find Julian, except that she was lonely; like a child, she was without any one to amuse her, and she had turned to Mr. Bryant, feeling that he at least would have been able to dispel her dullness.

"I shall go off to Homburg," she said to herself.

A few days before she had received a pressing invitation to go abroad with some rather flashy American people, whose acquaintance she had but recently made.

She could always go to the duchess; but somehow she wanted distraction, excitement; moreover, there were one or two tiresome matters which Lady Ellen was anxious to run away from.

As a matter of fact it was a new thing for her to have been backwards and forwards in London during August; but she had been considerably worried about money and as for a time, through Mr. Tenderten's good offices, this sort of annoyance had been taken from her so completely, Lady Ellen fretted now at having once again to deal with the cost of her extravagances.

This was really the reason why she had been unable to go away for any length of time; but not the only reason.

The fact was that, though she did not confess so much to herself, she was never really happy when she was away out of reach of Adrian Dawney.

She made pretence with herself and called him her friend, and said over and over again in her thoughts that she had need of him, that he was the one person in the world whose advice she thought was necessary, who really did know what was good for her.

This day, however, as she walked away slowly

from her visit to Julian Bryant's house, there came over Lady Ellen a reckless sort of feeling to cut herself adrift from all that, up to now, had signified so much to her.

"He asked me to go down to the farm," she said to herself, and there were tears in her eyes; "yet when I was there he seemed to want to get rid of me. How stupid I am! Why should I bother about Adrian when he doesn't bother about me; he was far more interested in those two girls, especially in that delicate, fair one. I suppose she has never done anything stupid or foolish!"

London was practically empty, at least empty of those people who made Lady Ellen's world.

She looked listlessly in the shop windows in Bond Street, and at last turned wearily to her own house.

There she found a very unpleasant letter, a letter in which she was warned that if she did not pay a certain debt by a certain time, proceedings would be taken against her.

She immediately went to the telephone and rang up Mr. Tenderten. His clerk answered that Mr. Tenderten had left for the country.

Lady Ellen felt inclined to cry.

"Adrian always told me that he was a horrid man," she said to herself; "and yet," was the next thought, "what am I to do without him?"

At this very moment the door was opened and Julian Bryant was announced.

Lady Ellen greeted him almost affectionately.

"Oh! you are a nice creature," she said. "I'm so lonely and so sorry for myself that I'm positively shedding tears."

"I hear that you called on me this morning. I'm awfully sorry I was not there, Lady Ellen. I had an idea that you were going abroad."

"What are you doing with yourself?" she

answered him with a question, as he sat down and she gave him some tea. " You look better, not that you were ever ill ; but you don't look so—well, I was going to say, so worried ; but of course that is perfectly stupid : what could there be to worry you ? I am the person who gets the worries ! "

Julian looked at her quickly and stirred his tea. He did not speak for a moment, and then he said :

" Well, I'm not used to being idle, and it rather got on my nerves. You know, before I came into this money, Lady Ellen, I was driving a taxi ; and I had to put in some real rough work before I was fit to do that. Well, I've gone back to it."

Lady Ellen clapped her hands.

" You're driving a taxi," she said.

He smiled faintly. " Not exactly ; but I'm starting a motor business. I must do something," he added listlessly.

" Is it a public matter ? Can I have some shares in it, Mr. Bryant ? "

" All the shares you want, if it is turned into a company ; at present it is nothing but a kind of amusement for me."

He drank his tea and then he looked at her very steadily.

" What are you worrying about ? " he asked.

She coloured hotly, and then she laughed.

" Mr. Pleydell, whom I think you know, would tell you that I make all my own worries ; but I don't think I am peculiar in that. Most of us make our own worries, don't we ? "

" Yes," said Julian Bryant.

It was his turn to colour, and he did so, vividly.

" Please forgive me, if I venture on a very delicate subject ; but I don't think you ought to be worried, Lady Ellen."

She agreed with him in her pretty fashion.

"Nor do I: it is just force of circumstances, you see."

"If," said Julian Bryant with some hesitation, "if—I might be allowed to handle the worries! I have the honour to regard myself as your friend, Lady Ellen, and I believe you look upon me in the same light, don't you? Well, then—will you be very good to me?"

Lady Ellen looked at him and then looked away.

He was like, yet so unlike, the man she loved. Julian was younger, handsomer; to most women, doubtless, he would have been the more attractive; but she had always before her eyes Adrian Dawney's face, with his strong, grave expression.

She almost hated herself for letting any other man call her friend, and yet life was so empty—so lonely!

"I won't misunderstand you, Mr. Bryant," she said; "but do you know, I don't think I must let you be good to me in the way you mean. After all, Mr. Pleydell is right; I am horribly extravagant! I do make my own miseries, and I think it is a good lesson for me to fight and not put them on to somebody else."

"I don't quite agree with you," Julian Bryant said.

She smiled at him.

"Ah!" she said, "you belong to the type of man who hates to see any woman fighting and struggling, and thinks that all women should be tenderly guarded and kept away from everything that is rough and cruel."

He turned white to his lips, and did not speak for a moment; and then he said:

"You—you judge me wrongly, Lady Ellen. I am afraid I don't merit this good opinion."

He was thinking in his turn of something other than this charming little room, with this pretty,

delightful woman facing him. He had gone back for an instant to the old sordid, narrow, unhappy life, with Enid always brave, always resourceful, always bright-tempered ; and the pang that went through his heart was like a pang of mortal pain.

It was at this very moment that the butler announced Mr. Tenderten.

The quick-eyed lawyer took in the fact that both these people had a confused, nervous expression ; and his jealous nature took flame at once, whilst at the same time a quick, cunning suggestion came into his mind.

"I hear that you rang me up, Lady Ellen," he said. "I tried to get through to you several times ; but then I thought perhaps it would be better if I came to see you."

"That is very good of you," said Lady Ellen with an effort. "You know Mr. Bryant, of course."

"How do you do, Bryant ?" said the young lawyer, rather coolly.

He accepted a cup of tea and began talking in his most aggressive fashion, and in a very little while Julian Bryant got up and took his departure.

"You are leaving town again at once," inquired Lady Ellen hurriedly, as she put her hand again into his.

He nodded his head.

"Yes, and you ?"

"Oh, I'm very uncertain. I rather think I shall go to Homburg. I don't know if I can manage it, but I'm so sick of London ! It has been so hot this year, hasn't it ?"

Julian did not shake hands with Tenderten ; he simply gave him a nod, and as he went away, the lawyer laughed.

"He has dropped into things pretty quickly, hasn't he ?" he said, with a sneer. "One would never

imagine, to look at him, that he had been down so low as to drive a cab."

If he thought to surprise Lady Ellen, he failed. She felt suddenly a great repugnance to Mr. Tenderten.

"Ah, but you see," she said, "Mr. Bryant would always be the right thing, whatever he did;" and this was a speech which brought the hot colour into Mr. Tenderten's cheeks.

"You want to go to Homburg, I hear," he said, as he put down his cup.

"Well, I think I shall go if you can come to my rescue," said Lady Ellen.

She realised very quickly that she could not afford to quarrel with him, although at this moment she awakened to the fact that she found him absolutely detestable.

He laughed.

"I'm proud to think that I can be of such importance in your life, Lady Ellen," he said.

She shrugged her shoulders.

"Well, you are very clever, and you have helped me so much."

"And you want me to help you again?"

There was a note in his voice that went to the core of Ellen Crooper's proud heart.

"No; I don't think so, Mr. Tenderten," she said.

"I—I am already too deeply in your debt. I must just struggle along as best I can."

He gave her a foxy look. Of course, he jumped at once to the conclusion that Bryant was going to help her.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I thought that you would rely upon me, Lady Ellen."

"I think," she answered him frankly, "that I have been relying too much on everybody all my life, and now it is time I did something for myself. Do you know, Mr. Tenderten, I am afraid Mr. Pleydell

is right! As long as I remain in this house and keep up all this establishment, I shall never be out of debt. Of course, I shall hate giving it up, but"—she shrugged her shoulders—"well, we have to do so many things we hate, don't we?"

He looked at her in a puzzled fashion. Certainly he was not prepared for this declaration of independence.

"As I told you some months ago, Lady Ellen, I never could see the need for such a drastic alteration in your life; and if you are still content to leave things to me—"

"Don't think me ungrateful, Mr. Tenderten," Lady Ellen said, "if I decide to wake up and do things for myself." She changed the subject gracefully. "What have you been doing all this time? You haven't been in London, have you?"

Mr. Tenderten enlarged upon his doings and threw in a few big names; but in reality he was perturbed. It was not at all his game to let Lady Ellen get out of his hands; and he knew that, without help from anybody, if she chose to sell her valuables such as she had, dispose of her pictures and her furniture, she would be able to raise sufficient money to pay him, and, at any rate, to settle the larger portion of her debts. He felt he had made a wrong move, and at once attempted to change this; but he was not wholly successful.

Lady Ellen sat some time after he had gone away thinking deeply; and she had just gone upstairs to dress for her lonely dinner when a note was brought to her.

It was from Julian Bryant. Inside there was a little enclosure, and in this enclosure was a blank cheque:

"I am leaving to-morrow for America," Julian

wrote. " My return is very uncertain. Perhaps you have guessed that I am not a very happy man, just as I have guessed that you are tender-hearted and most sympathetic. I am asking you therefore to be good to me, and to permit me to stretch out a hand to you, now that I know from your own admission that you need a friend's hand. If I am guilty of an act which shocks you, just tear up this letter and all it contains and try some day to forgive me."

Lady Ellen neither tore up the letter nor did she answer it. She took that little enclosure and locked it away among her jewels ; her eyes were moist as she did so. He was so like Adrian, that alone gave him a place in her thoughts ; but she liked him for himself also, and more so now that he had told her he was unhappy.

That night after dinner she wrote a letter to Mr. Pleydell and addressed it to his private address.

" I want to see you," she wrote. " I want you to help me. I've tried to go against your good advice, and now I'm face to face with really great difficulties. Please help me to put them right. I am ready to make any sacrifices and to start at once."

Another letter she wrote before she went to bed :

" NASTY ADRIAN," it began.—" You know it was very mean of you to send me away on Saturday, because I did so badly want to stay ; and once upon a time you invited me to be your guest. In a little while, I shall have some news to give you about myself ; but don't write to me, at least for a month, because I shall be far too busy to answer you. Ever yours, NELL.

" P.S.—Did you enjoy the music very, very

much at the Rectory? I went to bed at ten. I hear the others played bridge till four o'clock in the morning. I am done with that lot. I shall never go there again!"

CHAPTER XIV.

DESPITE all Mrs. Gresham's endeavours to persuade her to remain, Enid left the Rectory early on Monday morning. She had fulfilled her promise, however, and had remained in her room throughout the long, hot day of Sunday, and she had therefore missed her chat with Colonel Dawney, who had arrived at the Rectory about tea-time. Instead of talking to her, he talked to Mrs. Gresham.

"I can't help thinking that Miss Sinclair is in real need of friends," he said, when he and the Rector's wife found themselves alone for a little while.

Mrs. Gresham was very quiet for a moment, and then she said :

"It is useless to disguise the fact that Desmond is very much in love with her. I feel a little worried about it. I am sure it would upset his mother a good deal. You see, he is too young to marry yet awhile."

"Oh, yes, I understand," said Colonel Dawney with a faint smile; "but Hammond will grow out of this fancy. It is just a case of propinquity. They

have been thrown together a good deal. She is a very lovely young creature, and it would be a very queer sort of young man who did not lose his heart to her. I don't fancy she reciprocates his affection."

"I am quite sure she does not," Mrs. Gresham said; "as a matter of fact she told me that she was not going on with the tour, and I guessed at once the real reason."

"You are going to look after her?" queried Colonel Dawney, a moment or two later.

Mrs. Gresham answered promptly.

"Yes; if she will let me; but we are strangers, and although she may like me, just as I am drawn magnetically to her, I have no real place in her life."

Colonel Dawney got up. He stood, tall and soldierly, looking ahead of him for a few seconds, and then he said:

"I don't as a rule interfere in my neighbours' affairs; but there is something about this girl which seems to me to call for more than ordinary sympathy. I am a man, and I can't do anything, but—it is different with you; however," he held out his hand as he spoke, and smiled, "here am I teaching you your business. I wonder you don't box my ears."

"Come and see me again soon," said Mrs. Gresham.

An hour or so afterwards she went softly to Enid's room, and found the girl up and dressed and sitting in a chair.

"Colonel Dawney has sent you many messages. He was very much disappointed not to see you. I want you to promise to come back to me, will you?"

Enid looked at Mrs. Gresham quietly.

"I can't make any promises. I don't quite know what I am going to do. I am afraid I shall have to go to Canada. I have people there, you know. They won't be very pleased to see me come back, as I shall go, but at least they are my kith and kin,

and I have a right to turn to them. This much at least, I will promise you," Enid added the next moment; "and that is that if I do not go back to Canada, I will write to you."

"We are always here," Mrs. Gresham said. "If we go away, it is only for a few days; the Rector never cares to leave his people. Now you really feel rested?"

"Oh, so much better—quite another person; and I have a favour to ask you. I want to go away to-morrow quite—quite early. I don't want to hurt Mr. Hammond in any way. I—I wonder if you understand?"

"Perfectly," said Mrs. Gresham, smiling just for an instant. "Well, leave it to me. I will drive you to the station myself. You shall have your breakfast before eight o'clock, and we will get away in time to catch the express at the junction, which leaves a little after nine."

This programme was carried out, and so it was that Enid found herself travelling rapidly away from the country on a very hot morning.

She went, when she reached London, to Sybil Jackson's flat. There she was met by the information that Miss Jackson had gone abroad suddenly.

"Something to do with that there Women's Rights," said the porter. "I did hear say as she has gone to Russia, but that mayn't be right, you know; any way, she's locked up the flat and I've got the key. Will you be staying here, miss? Oh!" the porter added, "there was an old gentleman come inquiring for you, once or twice, since you've been away. He seemed a bit vexed he didn't see you."

"No; I shan't stay here," said Enid. "Miss Jackson might not like it, and besides I—I'm only in London for a few hours."

She had only a small kit-case with her, and as she

walked away, this hung heavily in her hand. Now what was she to do? Where was she to go? She had so little money, and Sybil Jackson was really the only person to whom she could turn for practical help and advice.

She walked on till she came to a place where she could get an omnibus, and she put herself into one without in the least knowing in what direction she would go, or what she would do when she got to the end of the journey.

Indeed, as the omnibus was rolling past one of the entrances to Regent's Park, she suddenly determined to get out and sit a while under the trees.

It was very pleasant there and she sat on long after the noonday sun had reached its height. She was conscious of feeling an exhaustion which came because she had not touched food since the very early morning; and all at once, she awakened with a start, to the knowledge that she must do something, or the night would be on her before she knew where she was going to sleep.

Thereupon, she started thinking in real earnest, and as she went over all possibilities she decided that it would be, perhaps, the best plan, if she went to the lodgings which had been her first little home with Julian. Here at least she would be known and treated with respect.

"There would be no fear," she said to herself bitterly, "of any one coming to find me. If he had wanted to do that he could have done so a long time ago."

She made her way back to the omnibus route and travelled out to Bloomsbury. She could not see very clearly when she reached the street that was so familiar to her.

Memories were crowding in on her. It seemed to her so strange that once she had passed up and

down this very street, so happy, so light-hearted, that she had been wont to sing as she walked.

It was with a sensation of something akin to joy that when she knocked at the door, she found herself, a moment later, facing the woman who kept the house. As she was greeted warmly, Enid felt that she had found a friend.

"Why, Mrs. Bryant!" exclaimed the landlady, a brisk, clean, middle-aged woman. "I was thinking about you only the other day, and wishing I could have you back again. I've had no luck with my rooms since you and Mr. Bryant left, and that's the truth; but won't you come in?"

She took the kit-case from Enid's hand, and she showed the way into a front parlour.

"Would you like a cup of tea, or perhaps you've had it?"

Enid thanked her eagerly.

"I haven't had anything to eat since the morning, Mrs. Chaplin. I've come up from the country," she explained.

"Oh, then you'll be wanting something badly. Just sit down, take off your hat."

As she hustled away the landlady shook her head. She had no need of words to tell her that Mrs. Bryant had fallen on hard times; in fact, she did not quite like to inquire after Julian. She was afraid lest something had happened to him. She was back almost directly with a rough tray, on which was spread teacups and a loaf and some butter.

"No; I've never had no decent folk since you went away," she chattered on. "I've often wondered about you, Mrs. Bryant. Did you get along comfortably, where you went?"

"Yes," said Enid. "It wasn't like being with you; but we managed all right, though times were very hard with us."

Mrs. Chaplin cut some slices of bread and butter, and went to and fro into the little adjoining room, bringing back at last a teapot and a boiled egg.

"It seems to me," she said, "we get nothing but hard times, some of us; but I did hope things were going to be a little bit better with you, my dear! Mr. Bryant, he were such a fine man, so strong and so willing, wouldn't have minded what he did now, would he?"

Enid took her courage in both her hands.

"I've come to you, Mrs. Chaplin," she said, "because I—I'm all alone now, and I want to live somewhere where I am known. I can only afford one room."

"It'll be a pleasure to 'ave you in' the house," said Mrs. Chaplin. "Now just eat that egg and drink the tea, and then we'll talk."

Enid drew near the table, trying very hard to keep back her tears. But there was something that had to be said, and she said it at once.

"I am going to ask you a favour. Will you—please not—not speak about Mr. Bryant?" she said. "I have been very, very unhappy, Mrs. Chaplin, even now I—I can't talk to you about him easily."

She knew that these words would imply something which was not the truth. But then the truth must never be told to any one. That had become a creed with Enid.

"I know how you feel, my dear," said Mrs. Chaplin; "and I'll ask no questions. I'm glad you came to me. You're one of the sort as I like. Now drink your tea, and don't you fret yourself more than you can help."

"Won't you have some tea, too, Mrs. Chaplin?"

Mrs. Chaplin sat down at once and became sociable. She informed Enid, that though she had had no

luck with lodgers, things were not quite so bad as they had been with her, for she had come into a little bit of money.

"In truth, you know, my dear," she said, "though it's not much, yet it do help, and so I haven't worried myself so much about letting as I used to do; and that makes it easier for you, too, because I don't like the idea of your being in one room. What you'd best to do is to take the two and just pay me what you can for them. We shan't fall out."

Enid bit her quivering lip.

"You are very good, Mrs. Chaplin," she said. "Just for the moment I can't afford very much, but—but I—I'm going to work. I must give lessons. Do you remember, when I was here, how we used to talk it over? There were one or two children you told me about then, who could have come to me. Perhaps I could teach them now."

"I'll look round, and we'll find somebody, though to tell the truth, my dear," Mrs. Chaplin said, "you don't seem to me none too strong to take on much."

"Oh! I am much stronger than I look," Enid said, bravely.

Mrs. Chaplin's brisk chitter and hearty, practical sympathy were very comforting and helpful. And when after the tea was finished, Enid climbed the narrow stairs to the two rooms where once she had been so happy, there came over her a sense of something like joy. Here at least she would have rest and peace, and dreaming of the old days live once again through the hopes and fears, and those hours of sweetest communion which had gone from her in actuality for ever!

CHAPTER XV.

M R. PLEYDELL was very much gratified by the letter from Lady Ellen Crooper. He said nothing about it at the office, but he took an early opportunity of calling upon Lady Ellen ; and in half an hour's chat with her, all his prejudice against this young woman was effectually dissipated.

He was slow and very legal, but he gave Lady Ellen a sense of reliability which she felt now, she had never experienced when dealing with his partner.

She had prepared herself for the most* drastic treatment, but Mr. Pleydell surprised her by his lenient view of the situation. He certainly approved of her reducing her expenses ; but he saw no reason, her told her, that she should regard herself as a pauper, absolutely ; and he thought it would be possible, by careful arrangement, to keep her in the little home of which she had grown so fond ; but, to ease the conditions of the moment, he suggested that Lady Ellen should shut up the house for a time, and so dismiss at least two of her maids.

“ You ought to go away,” Mr. Pleydell said.
“ Why not go and stay with her Grace ? ”

“ Yes, I'll do that,” said Lady Ellen.

She was like a child, eager to give obedience.

Mr. Pleydell smiled.

“ I must go into the question of your investments, Lady Ellen,” he said ; “ and I think I had better see what I can do with that house property in Fulham which was so heavily mortgaged by your husband.

The value of the property has very largely increased, you know, during the last two or three years. I think it more than probable that if we were to sell it, we should get not only enough to clear off the mortgage, but leave a little surplus in hand."

Lady Ellen felt quite relieved and light-hearted after Mr. Pleydell had gone away. First of all, she had the sensation of being released from a kind of bondage, Mr. Tenderten's manner the last time they had met had given her a very disagreeable impression. She had no desire to see him again, and she reproached herself that she had been rather too hasty in admitting him to her friendship.

Then she sat down and scribbled a line to her cousin, the Duchess of Wiltshire, and proposed herself as a guest for an indefinite period.

The duchess and her family were up in Scotland, just at this moment, and Lady Ellen knew that there would be plenty of room for her in the huge old castle which had been in the possession of the Wiltshires for generations.

She got an answer by telegram from her cousin, and at once began to make her plans for leaving. It was, however, well into September before she could arrange all her affairs.

Acting on Mr. Pleydell's advice, she paid off two of her servants, and the house was to be left in the charge of the other two.

"No weekly bills," Lady Ellen said to herself, "for at least a month or two. What a joy!"

By each post that had come she had looked for a letter from Colonel Dawney, but nothing reached her. On the very morning of the day, however, on which she had fixed to travel to Scotland, he suddenly appeared in her dismantled drawing-room.

"I am going away to-night," said Lady Ellen. "I am not sure that I shall ever come back."

"That sounds too terrible," he answered as he held her little hand and pressed it warmly. "Look here, I want you to come and have some lunch with me to-day. I've got a taxi waiting."

She skipped upstairs, put on her prettiest hat, and was down again immediately.

"You are the nicest thing I ever knew," she said to him ; and he laughed.

"I thought I was very nasty. That is what your last letter said."

"Oh ! perhaps that is how I felt when I wrote. Are we going to lunch alone, Adrian ? "

He nodded his head.

"Yes ; I know of a little old-fashioned restaurant where they give very good food, and we can sit and talk quietly. I want to ask you to do something for me."

"Do you ? " said Lady Ellen eagerly. "Oh ! I am glad ! "

The luncheon was the most delightful meal of which she had ever partaken, so Lady Ellen declared.

"Now, Adrian," she said, putting her elbows on the table, and propping up her chin with her two hands, when the coffee was served. "Now, what do you want me to do for you ? "

"I want you to be kind to another woman."

"Do I know her ? "

He shook his head.

"No ; though you have just seen her."

"I understand," said Lady Ellen. "You mean that awfully pretty, fair girl, who was having tea with you the afternoon I drove over."

"Yes, I mean her."

"Tell me something about her, Adrian ? "

Colonel Dawney did not answer immediately, and then he said :

"I know absolutely nothing; I imagine a good deal."

"Are you great friends with her?"

"No, I want to be her friend; but she doesn't give me the opportunity."

Lady Ellen tried very hard not to feel jealous; the effort was not quite successful.

"But I suppose you must know a little bit about her, otherwise you wouldn't ask me to help her."

"I know she is in trouble. So much, she confessed without words. One only had to look into her face to realise that."

"Where is she?" was Lady Ellen's next question. He gave a little sigh.

"I don't know. She left Mrs. Gresham's house early on the Monday morning after you met her, and except for a few words sent without any address, and posted from a railway station, Mrs. Gresham has heard nothing more of her."

Lady Ellen was silent. She had dropped her arms on the table and was playing with her rings.

"Of course, I shall be only too glad to do anything I can," she said.

"Yes, I am sure of that," Adrian Dawney answered.

"But it is rather difficult to help any one if one doesn't meet."

"Oh, I hope you'll meet, and soon," said the man. "From what her friend could tell me, I am sure that Miss Sinclair is most unhappy. She herself told me that she had no friends. I don't know how it is, Nell, but I have the feeling upon me very strongly that her trouble is not of her own making, and that there is some story of great wrong connected with it."

"It ought to be easy enough to find her."

But he shrugged his shoulders.

"A man can do so little for a woman, even though

his feelings for that woman may be absolutely platonic."

The light flashed back to Lady Ellen's face.

"Yes, it is rather silly, isn't it?" she said, "and the world is so beastly. Of course, I'll do all I can. It is a pity I'm going away, isn't it?"

"Well, it may be possible for you to interest the duchess in Miss Sinclair. From what Mrs. Gresham told me I gather that she is a very brilliant musician, and so your cousin may be able to give her a real start this winter. She has the power to do it, anyhow."

"You only have to ask Poppy, and she won't refuse you," said Lady Ellen. "But doesn't Miss Laurie know where Miss Sinclair is?"

"No; when she went away that morning she practically disappeared. Both Mrs. Gresham and I are most anxious to get in touch with her; and I hope to be able to write to you in a day or two and tell you that we have found out where she is." Then Colonel Dawney talked about Lady Ellen's own affairs and expressed the heartiest approval of what she had done.

"Don't have more dealings with that fellow Tender ten than you can help," he said. "I never liked him; I never quite understood how he came to be a partner with Pleydell. He is such a different type of man, so pushing."

"Yes," said Lady Ellen a little ruefully; "but I daresay I shall find it rather difficult to drop him; anyhow, I am going away now, and I shan't have to meet him for some time."

Colonel Dawney drove her home and stayed chatting on a little while with her. But after he had gone Lady Ellen sat down and shed a few tears.

"He didn't want me," she said; "he only wanted to talk about that other girl. I hope I am not going

to hate her ; but I know I shall if Adrian gets very fond of her."

Just at that moment her maid brought her a large box which had come from America. When this was opened it disclosed a number of exquisite roses, which, though they had travelled so far, had come in perfect condition, so carefully had they been packed.

Julian Bryant's card was attached to them, and Lady Ellen felt quite a thrill of pleasure at this remembrance.

" He is nice," she said to herself. " I am not quite sure if he isn't quite as nice as Adrian ; still, if not quite as nice, at least very nearly ! "

She took her roses with her when she travelled to Scotland, and the duchess smiled when she was told how far the roses had travelled and who had sent them.

" I like that young man," she said, " very much. He seems a little out of the common."

" Well, he certainly isn't a bit like the ordinary young man," said Lady Ellen. " Do you know, to use a slang expression, he seems to me to be quite ' fed up ' with all his money, and he's working at some motor-car invention, just working, you know, with his own hands, Poppy, spending hours at a time in a workshop. He has gone out to America, I believe, in connection with this invention. I am so glad you like him ! When he comes back you must get him up here."

" Of course," said the duchess ; " you shall write out to America and invite him. Have you seen Adrian lately ? "

" He gave me lunch yesterday. I was fearfully pleased to see him, and then he took all my pleasure away because he only wanted to see me to talk about some singing girl in whom he is suddenly interested,

very much interested, too ! He is going to get you to take her up, Poppy."

" If Adrian recommends her she must be good," said the duchess in a non-committal way.

When she left Lady Ellen's room she found herself for a few minutes alone with her husband.

" Nell is looking prettier than ever," she said ; " and I do believe that Mr. Bryant must have serious intentions. I rather hope he has."

" Nell mustn't be in too great a hurry. She made one horrible mistake," said the duke. " She mustn't repeat that mistake."

" Oh ! there would be no mistake with Mr. Bryant. I have studied him very closely," said the duchess. " He is a particularly nice man. I mean to ask him here while Nell is with us ; that will give them an opportunity of seeing more of one another."

The duchess said nothing about Adrian Dawney ; she had long ago guessed Lady Ellen's secret ; but she was too fond of her cousin and too really sympathetic a woman to discuss so delicate a matter, even with her husband. She was quite sincere in her intention to foster the very evident attraction Julian Bryant had for Lady Ellen, for she had settled in her mind that there was no likelihood of a future with Dawney. The duchess did not quite understand Colonel Dawney where her cousin was concerned ; undoubtedly he was fond of Lady Ellen, and took a deep interest in all she did, but he seemed content to play a merely brotherly part in the life of this charming young woman, and that being the case, the duchess convinced herself it was her duty to help along a marriage with the other man, who was in every sense of the word desirable.

For she knew that Lady Ellen was very, very lonely, and that at times the dark memories of her unhappy married life shadowed and depressed her ; moreover

there was the practical side of the question. Julian Bryant's money could make everything so easy and pleasant for Nell.

So it was that a letter was written and despatched to Mr. Bryant's house with the intimation that it was to be forwarded on to him.

And after a week or two there came a cablegram announcing that on his return a little later Julian Bryant would gladly avail himself of the Duchess of Wiltshire's kind invitation. The knowledge that his friendship was desired by Ellen Crooper and those connected with her was very stimulating to Julian's vanity, it excited him also. He was living, as a matter of fact, in a whirl of nervous excitement; the eager, hustling atmosphere in which the major part of the commercial world of America passes its existence just suited him.

Ketch had been left behind to look after everything in the new motor business, and Bryant was only too glad to occupy himself, to make business, even to create certain worries, anything rather than to have a spell of quietness in which to let thought grip him and remembrance come back to hurt.

He extended his stay in America when he knew that Ketch could get along very well without him.

Every now and then a very smudged and badly written letter reached him from his fellow-worker. It was evident that Ketch was not going to let any chance escape him of making his fortune!

With these letters came others. One from Frank Derryman, reminding him of his promise to go over to Ireland and hunt. Two from Mr. Pleydell, and once there arrived a curiously worded letter from Mr. Tenderten, which had been written, Julian felt quite convinced, with the full intention of being insolent.

Mr. Tenderten begged to remind Mr. Bryant that

there were various matters which had to be discussed between them, and that he should expect to have an early interview just as soon as Mr. Bryant returned to England.

It was, perhaps, the knowledge that he would have to come to close quarters with Tenderten that served to keep Julian Bryant in America. In fact, he was staying far longer than he had intended to do, and it was a rather plaintive little note from Lady Ellen (which reached him after much travelling) that decided him to cut short his visit and to go back.

"Poppy and I have been looking for you to appear every week," Lady Ellen wrote. "You are rather a disappointing person, Mr. Bryant! But perhaps you will redeem your character by coming up here for Christmas? Yes, actually Christmas! And do you know that it was August when I last saw you? You don't know how glad we shall be to have you with us, for Christmas here is rather enjoyable."

Bryant answered this letter with another cable-gram, announcing his immediate departure for England.

The colour flashed into Lady Ellen's face as she read this message. She was particularly well in health, and there was nothing ostensibly in her life to make her discontented, for Mr. Pleydell was managing her affairs and relieving her of all immediate anxiety; moreover, she was made so much of by her cousin and the duke that life might have been one spell of contentment, yet the old hurt rankled in her heart.

Adrian Dawney never came to Scotland, and he left her so long without news of himself that she was quite prepared to hear at any moment that he was married and lost to her for ever; but after a while news of him came. It appeared that he had not been at all well and that accounted for his silence.

He gave no definite promise, but he held up a hope that he, too, might travel up north and spend Christmas with the Wiltshires.

Lady Ellen was disappointed, and yet in a sense relieved that he did not mention the matter of that girl about whom they had spoken when last they had met.

She tormented herself just a little because she thought it probable that Colonel Dawney might judge her a little hardly for not having done something to help him.

"Yet, what could I do?" asked Lady Ellen of herself. "He did not know where she was, and he could hardly expect me to find her, especially as I had to come up here!"

Yet a sense of reproach lingered. It was the first thing Adrian had ever asked her, and she had failed him.

She told her cousin that she had had a letter from Colonel Dawney.

Adrian has been sedgy; but he seems to be all right now, and perhaps he will come up here, if we are good, in a week or two's time." Then Lady Ellen said impulsively, "Poppy, I wonder if you would think it funny if I were to go to London just for about a fortnight. I think I ought to go and see how things are at the house."

"Go, by all means," said the duchess in her genial way. "I think it will do you good. It is a bit monotonous up here, only don't stay longer than two weeks."

Lady Ellen travelled south with a little excitement fluttering in her heart.

She had sent a telegram to Colonel Dawney announcing her movements, and she hoped that he might perhaps take the hint and be at the station to meet her.

In this she was disappointed, but when she reached the house she found flowers sent at his direction, and a letter awaiting her.

He told her that he was sorry that he could not meet her, that he had to go to Yorkshire to attend the funeral of an old chum, but that he hoped to see her within twenty-four hours.

Although this gave her something to look forward to, Lady Ellen was conscious of feeling depressed and lonely.

The house had a mournful, shut-up look, and she hardly cared to take the trouble to see if any of her friends were in town.

There were innumerable cards, which had collected during her absence, and she went through these listlessly enough. Suddenly her face brightened and she picked up one name.

She rang the bell and questioned the servant.

“When did Miss Powis call, Mary?”

“One day last week, my lady.”

“I wish I could see her,” said Lady Ellen, in her impulsive way.

To think was to act. Mary rang up for a taxi and she drove over to see if she could find Miss Powis.

The woman she was going to see was a cousin of her late husband’s, a middle-aged, capable, kind woman, one whom Lady Ellen loved most sincerely. Miss Powis was a trained nurse, but, having a certain amount of money, she had taken up the duties of nursing almost entirely by way of charity.

The taxi was carrying Lady Ellen now to a street in Holloway

The pretty little woman shivered once or twice as she rolled through the cold of the afternoon.

“I wish I had Norah’s spirit; but I believe I should die if I had to live in these kind of places.”

Yet when she got to Miss Powis’s rooms they were

not only cheery and comfortable, but actually pretty ; and the neat maid informed her that her mistress would be back about tea-time.

"I'll wait," said Lady Ellen ; and she tossed off her furs and walked round the room, picking up the photographs and making herself quite at home.

In a very little while Miss Powis came in.

She wore her nurse's uniform. There was something stimulating about her. One felt oneself in the presence of a strong, resourceful, yet tender-hearted woman.

"Well, this is a pleasure," she said, as she kissed Lady Ellen. "I thought you were going to stay in Scotland all the winter."

"I'm only down here for a little while," said Lady Ellen ; "and when I saw your card I thought I must rush off and see you, Norah, you dear thing."

"Sit down ; we'll have some tea, and you shall tell me all about yourself," said Miss Powis.

"I've nothing to tell," Lady Ellen answered. "Yours is the interesting life, Norah." She laughed, with just a touch of bitterness in her laugh. "I'm nothing but a stupid, useless butterfly."

"Well, butterflies mean sunshine and flowers, you know."

Miss Powis smiled as she tossed off her bonnet and long cloak, and put the kettle on the spirit lamp.

Lady Ellen chatted away for a little while, but she was evidently restless. Suddenly she said :

"Can't you help me to do something, Norah ? I love seeing you, but you always make me a little unhappy, because there is such a contrast between us."

"Yes," agreed the other woman, "considering that I am old enough to be your mother, there is most certainly a contrast."

"I didn't mean that. I mean, one feels when one

as with you that there is nothing wasted in your life, that each hour, each minute, you are doing something for somebody else."

Miss Powis looked across at the pretty face, which had a pathetic touch in its expression.

"I have always wanted to see you in your own home, Nell. I mean in a proper sense. God forgive me for saying hard things of the dead, but—Harvey was a cruel man: he had no right to have married you, no right to have treated you in the way he did. You wouldn't come asking me to help you, if your life was what it ought to have been. Now, there's a nice cup of tea, and these are some of my favourite scones. Come and tell me all about Scotland. Oh! by the way, Nell," Miss Powis pulled up her chair and sat down to the cosy table, "can you give me Adrian Dawney's address?"

Lady Ellen's heart thrilled, as it always did, at the mere mention of this man's name.

"He is down in Kent, living in a farmhouse, you know."

"But doesn't he ever come to London?"

"Yes; as a matter of fact, I believe he will be in town to-morrow. I had a note from him to-day. Can I give him a message?"

"I should like to see him for a few minutes. There is a little matter of business I want to discuss with him."

"I thought you always corresponded," said Lady Ellen.

Miss Powis shrugged her shoulders.

"Oh! my dear," she said, "really, I am shocking where letters are concerned. I believe Adrian did write to me last, but it's ages ago. I think about him a great deal. He is a fine man, Nell."

"Yes, he is nice," said Lady Ellen, and she drank

her tea hurriedly. Then she added : " Scribble him a line, I'll see that he gets it." Though she loved to talk about him, in a sense she was almost sorry that his name had cropped up just now. For, in truth, Lady Ellen hardly understood her own feelings with regard to Adrian Dawney : at least, she knew perfectly well that he was the dearest and the best, the only man in all the world for her, but having conceived certain ideas about him (imagining that she held only a secondary place in his thoughts) she was schooling herself to grow, if not exactly indifferent, at least reconciled to the fact that she would have to live out her future without the joy of closer intercourse with this man whom she loved.

Moreover, she was honestly trying to train her thoughts to turn to Julian Bryant. She liked him sincerely. The fact that her cousin, the duchess, liked him and approved of him was also a great thing.

She quite saw the truth of what Norah Powis said. She was a woman born to be the centre of a home ; she loved little children. She was not really, at heart, a worldly creature, one who lived only for excitement and amusement : she was too simple-hearted, and she longed for all those beautiful yet ordinary joys which fill the lives of most women.

Should she go on hugging to herself the hope which grew dead even in her grasp, or should she turn and find her proper place in a second marriage with Julian Bryant ?

This was really at the root of her restlessness, and at times made her almost unhappy.

She sat a long time with Miss Powis, and felt altogether cheered and helped, although they exchanged no confidences when she took her departure.

Lady Ellen had told her cab to come back for her in an hour's time, and was soon driving back to the West End.

Miss Powis gave a good deal of thought to her after Lady Ellen had gone.

"She is a dear soul!" she said to herself. "Why doesn't Adrian make her happy?"

The maid, when she came in, brought a message to tell her that she was wanted by a certain case: but before she went out Miss Powis sat down and scribbled a few lines to Colonel Dawney. She addressed this, care of Lady Ellen.

"DEAR ADRIAN," she wrote,—"I hear from Nell that you are in town for a day or two. Do make it convenient to come and see me. I am afraid I can't get west, as I am very pressed with work. I want to speak to you about a certain matter in which I am very interested. Could you manage to run up here to-morrow about six o'clock?"

She posted the letter herself, and walked briskly along, after she had done so, in the direction of the rather shabby, gloomy lodging-house where her patient was awaiting her.

"I'd give a good deal," she said to herself, "to bring Nell and Adrian together; but I don't quite see how it is going to be done; and perhaps, after all, one might blunder! I am only afraid Adrian will realise what he has lost when he finds that some other man has come into Nell's life."

CHAPTER XVI.

IT had been hot, sultry August when Enid had taken up her life in the old rooms where she and Julian had once been so happy.

There was exquisite pleasure and pain combined for her to find herself in these well-known surroundings ; and just for a few days she did nothing but rest and let Mrs. Chaplin take care of her.

Her landlady was genuinely sorry for her, and was kindness itself ; but Enid quickly realised that the kindness was confined to Mrs. Chaplin : also she discovered in a very little while that she had made a great mistake in going back to where she had been known. People were naturally curious about her. It was all very well for her to tell Mrs. Chaplin that she did not wish to talk about her husband ; but other people discussed him.

The knowledge came suddenly to Enid one morning that the story of Julian's great fortune had penetrated even to this small world ; and with this story a certain element of doubt, if not actual suspicion, was born of herself.

Several days later Enid made another discovery. She realised that Mrs. Chaplin's kindness was no longer spontaneous.

By this time the rush of blood to her face and pain at her heart was easy to understand. She was discredited ! The story of her widowhood, which had been suggested by Mrs. Chaplin, it is true, but tacitly accepted by her, was disbelieved.

She resolved at once on making a move.

"I have had an offer of some work," she said to Mrs. Chaplin. "It will take me right over the other side. I am awfully sorry to leave you, but——"

"Well, my dear, everybody must think for themselves," said Mrs. Chaplin. "I—I'm sorry to feel you must go, but perhaps you are wise."

"Will you tell me what you mean by that?" asked Enid a little coldly.

Mrs Chaplin fumbled with her apron, and did not answer immediately, and then she said in an abrupt way

"I didn't mean to say anything to you, because, after all, it's your business, but they're talking about you round about here, and that's the honest truth. They say as Mr. Bryant isn't dead One or two declare as they've seen him swelling round about in motor-cars, and well—I'll leave you to guess what they say about you."

"I'll go away at once," said Enid hoarsely, "at once! Will you help me pack my things?"

"Nay! There is no such hurry as all that," said Mrs. Chaplin, a little ashamed, as it were.

But Enid was now in a fever to escape from these old surroundings.

She was horribly hurt; the suggestion was so ugly, so humiliating, yet, not even for this would she speak the truth. To put herself right in the eyes of these people would be to degrade him, and Julian's honour was still a treasure to her. Moreover, if she were to have told the truth, who would have believed her?

Some hours later, she was seated in a taxi, with her modest luggage on the seat beside her, and she had told the driver to go to some lodgings, the address of which, by mere chance, had been given her by the baritone of the little touring party.

Literally, she did not know where she would find the money to pay for the lodgings at the week's end,

for all she had left were a few shillings, and these the cab fare would practically exhaust, yet the relief at leaving Mrs. Chaplin's house was so great that, though she was ill, she felt almost happy as she drove away.

When the new lodgings were reached, she had the good fortune to find one, and only one, room vacant. She gave the name of the singer who had recommended her, and the landlady spoke of this one room deprecatingly; but when Enid had climbed up and had looked at it, she decided to take it.

"I shall be out all day at my work," she said; "and this will do splendidly."

The price was very modest, and after she had unpacked her few things, she went out and walked in search of a music shop.

Apparently there was not such a commodity in the neighbourhood, but in the window of one of the local stores she caught sight of music, and entering boldly, she made her way to this department and asked to speak to the manager.

With feverish nervousness she detailed her various qualifications. She could copy music, transpose; she could play, she could sing, she could teach. All she wanted was to earn a little money.

She did not receive much encouragement. The manager told her that the gramophone and mechanical instruments had practically wiped out the value of a pianist's services; but he took down her name and address, and promised that if he heard of anything he would let her know; and after she had gone he said to one of his assistants, with a shrug of his shoulders, "More fit for the hospital than for anything else."

As a matter of fact, as she walked through to another department, scarcely knowing where she went, a sort of blindness came over Enid. Suddenly

she staggered to a seat, and as she dropped on to the chair, she lost consciousness for a few seconds.

A young woman who was shopping close by, noticed her, and went at once to her assistance.

She exclaimed when she saw Enid :

" Why, it's Enid Sinclair ! " she said. " Don't you remember me ? I was Mary Pearson. Let's go and sit over there. I'll get you some water. You do look ill."

She was very kind, and little by little Enid came back to the knowledge of what was passing with her.

" I've often thought of you," said the other. " You were going to do such wonders at the Academy, do you remember ? And then, of course, the usual story—you married, didn't you ? and everything was ended. Are you living up in this neighbourhood ? "

" Yes," said Enid feebly. " I've—I've just come near here I'm all alone now, and I must work to keep myself. I came to this shop to see if they could put me in the way of anything. I don't care what I do "

" Where are you staying ? "

Enid gave her address. She spoke of having toured, and she said that Miss Manon Laurie would be a reference for her if such were necessary.

" I know Manon Laurie," said the young woman ; " I don't want any reference. You must let me help you. I'm married to a doctor, and he is doing very well. My name is Hughes now. I always liked you, Enid ; you were such a pretty creature, and so jolly. I can't bear to see you as you are now. Look here, my dear, forgive me if I am very plain, but do you want a little money ? "

Enid grew crimson, and then said in a low voice :

" Yes."

"I'm going to drive you home," said Mrs. Hughes, "and you must let my husband come and see you."

"Oh, no ; oh, no," Enid answered hurriedly. "Thank you very, very much. I'm not really ill, only worried, and it has been so hot."

"Oh, my dear, you've got to be taken care of," the other young woman said earnestly. "You're simply not fit even to be out alone."

"I shall be all right if I can get work. Help me to get some work," said Enid, feverishly

Mrs. Hughes did not answer or press her views any further. She saw that Enid was really ill ; in fact she half supported her friend as they walked out of the shop.

Outside she hailed a cab, and when they were driving away she said to Enid : "You are married, are you not, dear ? I heard that was why you left the Academy ; but I never heard your new name ? "

Enid paused just for an instant, and then she said in a very low voice :

"Please call me Mrs. Sinclair."

Mary Hughes said nothing, but a little mist came over her eyes. She was an impulsive, kind-hearted young woman, and something about Enid touched her very painfully.

The landlady at the lodgings was openly impressed by the fact that Mrs. Hughes was a friend of her new lodger.

The doctor's wife insisted on helping Enid to climb the stairs to that one little room, and when they were there she opened her purse and poured all the money in it on to the table.

"Look here, this is all I have with me, Enid ; but I'm going to take care of you. Yes ; I'll try and get you some work ; but, first of all, you have to get a little better ; and if you won't see my husband—well, you shall see some one else who is quite as

good as a doctor. She is a great friend of mine such a nice woman ! She does a good deal of nursing in this neighbourhood. My husband finds her invaluable. I think I shall ask her to come and see you this evening. Her name is Norah Powis, and I know you and she will be great friends."

Mrs. Hughes did not leave until she had seen that Enid had various little comforts. Further, she insisted that her friend should undress and get into bed.

" I'll send you round some books and a few flowers, and I'll call on my way home and tell Miss Powis to come and see you this afternoon."

Words were impossible to Enid. She was overwhelmed with this kindness ; also her physical weakness, her sense of exhaustion, was so great that she could do nothing but lie still, and seemingly accept all that was done for her in silence.

Mrs. Hughes was as good as her word. An hour or so later she called again, with flowers and books and fruit.

That same evening Norah Powis climbed the many stairs to the little room where Mrs. Sinclair lay, and in the first meeting Enid's heart went out to her. She was kind and womanly, as Mrs. Gresham had been ; but there was more than this about her. She had strength, she had sympathy. Life had given her an understanding which made an instant and magnetic bond between them ; and in the days that followed when Enid was very, very ill, it was extraordinary how this fragile and unhappy creature crept into the very heart of Norah Powis.

The doctor's wife was practical, womanly, thoughtful ; but it was really Norah Powis who actually fought for the life of this young creature. She dragged Enid back from the grave—she and Dr. Hughes between them ; and on this late December

afternoon, after Lady Ellen had left her, she was making her way to that little room at the top of the tall lodging-house. As she walked, her thoughts slipped quickly away from Ellen Crooper and her future. Lady Ellen at least had friends ; she was safe in a material sense, but the future which stretched before Enid Sinclair was one that had grown to be a great trouble to Miss Powis, and she did not know how she could best help this girl, whom she really loved.

CHAPTER XVII.

LADY ELLEN went back to Scotland long before the fortnight was up. She carried with her a quantity of luggage, and when she met the duchess she smiled a rather wan little smile.

"I am going to stay with you, Poppy," she said, "till you turn me out."

"Well, my dear ; there is plenty of room," her cousin answered gaily.

She saw at once that something had happened to upset Lady Ellen, and she was a little more tender in consequence.

"You have lost all your fresh, rosy looks," she said. "I suppose there was nothing but fog in London."

"No," said Lady Ellen ; "as a matter of fact,

the weather was excellent, very sunny and almost warm, not a bit like Christmas."

"Mr. Bryant will be here just in time," the duchess observed.

She had escorted Lady Ellen up to her room, and stirred the fire vigorously as she spoke.

"He arrives in Liverpool on the twenty-third, and will travel up here, so that we shall have him with us for dinner on Christmas Eve."

"Tell the children to hang out all the largest stockings they can get," Ellen Crooper laughed, but as the duchess was leaving her she said, "Don't go, Poppy. It is so nice to be with you again! I wonder why I went to London. I've just the most extraordinary Jack-in-the-box sort of feeling with me these days, and it is time I settled down, isn't it? I am getting quite old."

"Yes, quite old," said the duchess, with a smile. "But didn't you get yourself some new clothes?"

Lady Ellen shook her head.

"No; I had various interviews with Mr. Pleydell and he is so very nice to me, and gave me so much praise for being economical, that I was actually strong enough to deny temptation. One thing annoyed me," Lady Ellen said, a little abruptly. "I had a very disagreeable interview with Mr. Tenderten. He asked me to marry him, Poppy!"

"Well," said the duchess, "I must borrow one of my boy's phrases and say, 'that was cheek!'"

"Yes, wasn't it?" said Lady Ellen. "He took my breath away, and then—well, he would have been quite nasty, only Mr. Pleydell happened to come in, and Mr. Tenderten went away in a great hurry."

"Did you see anybody else?" asked the duchess.

"Yes, one or two people. Adrian was in town, just the day I arrived, and he promised to dine with me, and then he threw me over suddenly—in fact,

rather rudely," said Lady Ellen, laughing with an effort. "I am not going to trouble about Adrian any more ; he is no use in a social sense ! He really is only fit for his farm and his pigs."

"Well, dearest, I hope you are going to have a very happy time with us," said the duchess, and she went forward and kissed Lady Ellen affectionately.

"I am always happy with you, Poppy dear."

But it was generally recognised that Lady Ellen was restless and out of spirits. She certainly had grown thinner, though she was as pretty as ever.

The little pathetic note about her gave her an added charm ; a charm which was instantly felt by Julian Bryant when he arrived on Christmas Eve.

It was like a dream to him to pass into the old hall of this wonderful old castle, to be received as almost one of the family.

Here, at last, he might forget for a little while. And there was so much he wanted to forget !

His mother was in England bombarding him with letters, eagerly excited to see him. She had installed herself in his house in town, greatly to his servants' disgust ; and Julian knew that she would be quite capable of travelling up to Scotland, and foisting herself on his present hosts, if she only had an inkling where he was.

Like Lady Ellen, Julian had grown much thinner. But he was, if possible, handsomer than he had been, and in his rough travelling coat, as he entered the hall, his likeness to Adrian Dawney was almost painful for Lady Ellen to realise.

They stood alone for a few seconds, and they clasped hands, really glad to see one another, for there was something which drew them together ; although in both their hearts there was a shutter, as it were, closing out all that was really best and truest in both of them.

"Welcome," said Lady Ellen. "I am glad to see you."

Julian said nothing, but only clasped her hand very, very tightly.

He was immediately accepted as a "good sort" by the young members of the ducal household. The duke himself took kindly to the young man, and as to the duchess, she frankly confessed that she was more than half in love with him.

She did not tell Lady Ellen that it was she who had prevented Colonel Dawney from joining them on Christmas Day.

After Lady Ellen's return she had thought things out, and she had decided that it was altogether for the best that her cousin should not meet this man again for some time at least; so she very frankly gave Dawney a hint:

"I believe things are working out for Nell's future which will altogether be for her happiness. I am playing the matchmaker, in the most barefaced manner, but I have taken Mr. Bryant's measure, and I think he is just the man for Nell. I hope you will come up and stay with us in the New Year." After she had signed her letter, the duchess added a postscript. "By the way, Nell tells me that the singer about whom you were interested is needing help; and she said you wanted me to take this girl up; I want you to know that I shall be delighted to do anything I can. Will you let me have this young lady's address, and I will write to her? Wiltshire House can be at her disposal if she wishes to give a concert in town this season."

Colonel Dawney's reply to the duchess's letter did not come till after Christmas. He sent a few scribbled good wishes to Lady Ellen, and with it a box of violets. When he did write to the duchess he thanked

her warmly for her kind suggestion about the concert. He told her that he feared his protégé would be unable to avail herself of this kindness.

"As a matter of fact," he wrote, "I have only just within the last week or so heard anything of Miss Sinclair, and I regret to say that she is in very bad health, and, what is worse, in very, very poor circumstances. I am doing what little I can, but the position is one which is extremely delicate, and I find it practically impossible for me to move actively in Miss Sinclair's affairs."

Acting on impulse, the duchess sat down and wrote a cheque. She enclosed it with a few lines to Colonel Dawney.

"I want you," she said, "to use this money how you like for this poor girl. Please don't refuse me, and if you would like it when I come south, I will look after her personally."

She said nothing of this correspondence to Lady Ellen, for she did not wish even to mention the name of Dawney.

Lady Ellen had not confided in her, yet it seemed to the duchess that things were practically settled between herself and Julian Bryant. At least, when Mr. Bryant left for London rather abruptly one day, Lady Ellen seemed very depressed and out of spirits.

Late that night when the duchess went in to have a little confidential chat with her, Lady Ellen spoke of Julian.

"I like him very much," she said; "but do you know, Poppy, I have made one very great discovery. He is a very unhappy man."

"Is he?" said the duchess, "why should he be unhappy?"

Lady Ellen shrugged her shoulders. "I don't know, but I am quite sure I am right, and I wish I could help him!"

"Nell, do you like him? I mean in the real sense of the word?"

Lady Ellen stood in front of the fire, a slim, almost childish figure, in her long white dressing-gown.

"I like him very, very much," she said slowly. "I have a sense of comfort and pleasure when I am with him, but I don't love him, Poppy. I—I don't believe I ever should."

"And he? Does he care for you?"

"He has not said it in so many words," said Lady Ellen; "but he certainly gives me the idea he could care. Only if it wasn't rather silly, Poppy, I should be inclined to say that he feels for me just what I feel for him!"

"Well, sympathy is a very good thing to work upon," said the duchess cheerily. Then she probed the matter.

"Nell," she said, "if Julian Bryant asks you to marry him, what are you going to say?"

Lady Ellen paused a moment, and then she answered:

"If Julian Bryant asks me to marry him, I shall say 'yes'!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

ON arriving in London, Julian Bryant went to an hotel. He was resolved not to meet his mother, and further resolved to teach her that she could not enter into his life in any way whatever

His heart had hardened towards her. In the beginning, as Mrs. Marnock had told him on that memorable last interview which had taken place between them, Julian had made a whole sacrifice of his life for his mother's sake. He had stood by her most chivalrously. He had burdened himself with her obligations ; he had behaved very generously. But when she had married a second time and life had become easy for her, moreover, when the opportunity had been given her to act generously in her turn towards him she had failed miserably ; and oddly enough, it was his mother's hard words about Enid which made the man so bitter now in his thoughts of her.

He did not even tell Stephens that he was in London. He had no need of a servant ; in fact, he preferred to be quite alone ; but he wrote to Mr. Pleydell and begged the lawyer to see him as soon as possible.

The first part of his interview with Mr. Pleydell was easy enough, for in this Julian dealt entirely with the question of his mother.

"I authorise you," he said to the lawyer, "to acquaint my mother with the fact that I am going to shut up my establishment for some long period, and that it is not my wish that she should instal

herself in my house. She has gone there without any reference to me or my wishes, and she must leave immediately."

After this there was a little uncomfortable pause, and then Julian said :

" I have asked you to come to-day, Mr. Pleydell, because I want to consult you upon another matter. Some little time ago, you will remember, I said that I did not wish to speak of my wife. Now, I find that I must break the silence I imposed. Can you give me any news of her ? "

" None whatever," said Mr. Pleydell, quietly. " She seems to have disappeared ; as a matter of fact, I had a letter from the lady to whom she went when she left you, asking me for information about Mrs. Bryant ? "

" I suppose she can be found," Julian Bryant asked in a low voice.

" Well, yes," said Mr. Pleydell " I dare say she can be traced if we use professional means."

Again there was another pause, and then with a rush of colour to his face, Bryant said :

" It has become necessary for me to know where she is, because I want to take steps to have our freedom made complete."

" You propose to divorce Mrs. Bryant ? " Mr. Pleydell asked in his quietest way.

A curious sensation shot through Julian Bryant's heart. This time he turned very white.

" No ! " he said hurriedly. " That—that is out of the question." Then he turned to the lawyer. " Look here," he said, " I suppose you know how to deal with these kind of matters ? The law is very clever. If two people want to be put apart, the law can do it, can't it ? "

" There is one method which the law follows in such cases," said Mr. Pleydell coldly ; " and if you

do not propose to divorce Mrs. Bryant then you would have to give Mrs. Bryant cause and reason for divorcing you."

Julian Bryant got up and moved about restlessly.

"The position is intolerable," he said. "You know, or perhaps you don't know, because after all, I am a stranger to you, but it is God's truth, Pleydell, that if she hadn't left me I would never have separated from her?"

"I am glad to hear you say that," Mr. Pleydell said, and there was real emotion in his voice. "I confess, now, that I was very much impressed, at the time you heard of Mrs. Marnock's strange bequest, by your loyalty to the woman you had married."

The younger man did not answer at once. Mr. Pleydell's words swept him back into that past he seemed to be in touch with once again, and that, acutely, with all the mental strain which had worked so disastrously against him.

"I did nothing extraordinary," he said in a low voice. "I—I was tempted, and you know that, but I would never have left her, and—the last thing I expected was that she would leave me; but she did go, and she behaved cruelly, Pleydell! For it was cruel to leave me as she did, to put me—where I am now—never to send me a word or a line to let me know whether she was living or dead. There are things which are unforgivable! And on her must rest the responsibility of all that follows!"

"And so you want to have a complete separation from Mrs. Bryant, because she left you imagining she was doing the best for you?" There was a little touch of irony in Mr. Pleydell's voice.

"I won't go into any reasons," said Julian Bryant very coldly. "I just state a fact. I want—freedom. I want to have my life to myself, without any tie, any barrier, because—"

"I understand," said Mr. Pleydell, and he got up, "because you have made other plans for the future? Well, I shall have to go into this matter rather carefully. Divorce is a little out of my line, Mr. Bryant. I think you would do better to have consulted Tenderten. He is more up to it than I am, and he is, if I may say so, less hampered by certain scruples than I am."

"I will have nothing to do with that man," said Julian Bryant. "If you won't act for me in this well, then, I'll go to some one else."

Mr. Pleydell bowed.

"If you will permit me to say so, that will be preferable."

Julian winced. He was almost hyper-sensitive in these days.

"All right," he said tersely. "I only thought I had better broach the matter to you first. I suppose you have no objection to dealing with other business for me?"

"None whatever," said Mr. Pleydell; "and I will see to your wishes about your mother without delay."

It was not long before Mr. Tenderten discovered that his partner was in constant correspondence with Julian Bryant, and to find out Mr. Bryant's whereabouts was an easy matter.

He did not approach Julian by letter, but late one afternoon he presented himself at the hotel.

"I am perfectly well aware that you don't wish to see me," he said, as Julian stood without offering his hand. "But, as I wrote to you some little while ago, there are certain matters which have to be discussed between us, and as you have not come to me I have come to you."

"I don't see what matters there are to be discussed between us," Bryant answered curtly.

"Don't you?" said Mr. Tenderten. "Why, my

dear fellow, you are strangely ignorant or wilfully forgetful. Perhaps you are not aware, that if it hadn't been for me you would never have touched a penny of Mrs. Marnock's money?"

Julian looked at him almost insolently. "I have already paid your firm's account in full," he said.

"This has nothing to do with the firm."

"Oh!" said Bryant with a sneer, "I understand. Well, how much do you want?"

"It isn't all money, I want," Mr. Tenderten answered, losing his temper. "I have some plain truths to speak to you. You have chosen to treat me as I never permit any one to treat me, and I am not going to stand that."

"What are you going to do?" asked Julian with a sneer, "Thrash me?"

"It is not a question of fists or force," Tenderten answered, white to the lips. "I fight with other weapons. I can see as well through a brick wall as most people, and I know what you've got in your mind just now. I know that you are trying to find your wife so that you can get her consent to divorce you, and I know why you are doing this! It is because you intend to marry Lady Ellen Crooper. Well, Lady Ellen Crooper is a friend of mine, and I don't intend to let her have anything to do with you."

Bryant walked across the room and flung open the door.

"Get out!" he said.

But Mr. Tenderten looked at him with vindictive eyes, ugly eyes.

"Talk business and I'll go," he said. "Take the high hand with me, and I'll make you suffer! It isn't difficult for me to see that, whatever your plans may be for the future, you haven't let Lady Ellen into your confidence yet. You haven't, for instance,

informed her of the interesting fact that you already possess a wife, have you?"

Julian Bryant looked at him for an instant, his whole face ablaze with passion, then he closed the door.

"Talk business," he said.

It would have given Mr. Tenderten an immense amount of pleasure to have been able to have snapped his fingers at this suggestion; but, as it happened, he was in particular need of money.

The more he pursued the line he had laid down for himself in life, the more he realised that he must have money, not a little money, but a fortune; for by money alone could he unlock the door to a real social position.

The abrupt termination of his friendship with Lady Ellen was a bitter pill for Tenderten to swallow, more bitter still when he realised what place it was that Julian Bryant had in the sentiment and esteem of this charming woman. Therefore, he was fully determined that Bryant should make up to him in a material sense what he had lost in other ways; and here at last he had some satisfaction, for it was pretty evident that the other man had no desire that Lady Ellen should be informed of how matters stood with him just at present.

The mere fact that he was invited to discuss business instead of being kicked out, assured him that the game was, to a certain extent, in his hands.

When a cheque had been written and he had folded it up and put it in his notecase, he looked at Julian with a curious expression in his eyes.

"I understand from Mr. Pleydell you offered him the work connected with your proposed divorce, and that he refused you. I'll take it on, if you like."

Julian Bryant said "No!" tersely.

"Don't you trust me?" asked Tenterden with a little sneer.

"I want to forget that you exist," the other man answered, half passionately; and then almost involuntarily, he said—"And I won't let you come in contact with my wife—now or at any time."

Mr. Tenterden only laughed, gave a nod of his head and turned away; but, when he was outside the room descending the stairs to the street, he said to himself:

"I think I shall have to make it my business to find Mrs. Bryant."

* * * * *

Early in the year Mrs. Gresham always came up to London to stay with her sister, Mrs. Hammond.

It was an old-established custom that they should do the January sales together.

On this occasion the sisters stayed at Mrs. Hammond's comfortable house, which was opened for the occasion.

Mrs. Gresham found her sister a little excited.

"I didn't write to you," she said; "but I have been longing to see you to tell you my good news. Desmond has given up his ideas of being a professional singer, and has joined his uncle's business! Of course," the mother added, "in a way, I am frightfully sorry, because, poor darling, he has got such a lovely voice; but he seems lately to have lost all interest in singing. Do you know, Kate, I've always had a sort of suspicion that there must have been a little love affair whilst he was on tour. You saw two of the girls, didn't you? What were they like?"

"One of them was the sweetest and nicest girl I have ever seen," said Mrs. Gresham; "so pretty! And the other was a very handsome creature, not quite so refined; but she was engaged to be married."

Mrs. Hammond caught her breath with a little sigh, and poured herself out a fresh cup of tea.

"Well, perhaps it was the pretty, nice girl!" she said. "Anyhow, my boy is changed."

Mrs. Gresham laughed. "We all change as we get a little older."

"Yes," said the mother; "but Desmond is not really very old yet. Of course, all the family are delighted," she added. "They were so down on this singing business."

"I don't quite care to see Desmond shut up in the city," said Mrs. Gresham. "Still, after all, I think he has done wisely. He has a *charming* voice, but he would never have achieved great things as a singer, you know."

To this, however, the mother would not listen. She had her own views about her boy's voice, and considered that he would have had the whole world at his feet in a very short time if he had only continued on the concert platform.

"Do you see anything of this girl now? What was her name?" she asked.

Mrs. Gresham's face clouded a little.

"No; I have neither seen nor heard anything of her. She said she might be going back to Canada. Her name was Sinclair."

"I wonder if Desmond sees her," the mother suggested hurriedly and half jealously.

"I don't think so," Mrs. Gresham answered; "but of course I don't know; but I have a sort of idea she is not in England."

"Desmond will be here in a few minutes," said Mrs. Hammond, glancing at the clock. "He is looking forward to seeing you so much."

Indeed at that moment Desmond Hammond came in. His aunt embraced him warmly, and as she did so she noticed that his mother was right; he was

changed. He had lost his boyishness ; he was very good-looking, but he had a subdued, almost a reserved air.

" Tea, darling ? " asked his mother, looking at him proudly. " I've been giving Aunt Kate your news."

" And of course you approve ? " the young man queried, glancing at his aunt.

She gave him a smile and a nod of her head.

" But I hope they aren't going to work you very, very hard, Desmond," his mother said.

Young Hammond laughed.

" Oh ! I don't think there is any fear of that. So far I find the work awfully easy."

The telephone bell rang at that moment, and the footman asked Mrs. Hammond if she would speak to a friend.

When they were alone Mrs. Gresham looked at her nephew.

" I believe you've grown, Desmond," she said.

" There is just this little difference in me," he answered. " I am a man now ; and I look at life through a man's eyes."

His aunt stretched out her hand to him.

" Do you know I am a little bit sorry," she said. " I am so fond of boys."

" Well, I was one long enough, and not the nicest of boys either," he added with a little laugh. " Tell me about everything," he went on rapidly. " How's uncle and how's the dear Rectory ? "

They chatted quietly for a minute or two, and then Mrs. Gresham said :

" By the way, Desmond, do you ever see Colonel Dawney in town ? He hasn't been at the farm now except for a day or two for some time."

A curious expression crept in Desmond's face.

" We haven't met to speak to," he answered ;

"but I have seen him more than once." Suddenly he said, "I wonder if I like him. I wonder if he is a really straight man, Aunt Kate?"

"Oh! my dear!" said Mrs. Gresham, quite shocked. "Why, your uncle thinks Adrian Dawney one of the best men he has ever met!"

"Does he?" the young man asked.

There was a curious little suggestion of bitterness in his voice, which troubled his aunt; but his mother came fluttering into the room just at that moment, and there was no more time for private conversation.

Mrs. Gresham, however, pondered a good deal on the marked change in her nephew, and came at last to the conclusion that it was very evident that some new influence had been at work in Desmond's life to bring about this very great change. She felt, shrewdly, that his mother had hit the right nail on the head, and she, herself, at once associated the singer in whom she had been so interested with this matter. She was afraid the boy had been very unhappy and, against herself, she could not help feeling a little hard towards Enid Sinclair; as a matter of fact, Mrs. Gresham had her own small grievance where Enid was concerned. She had shown the girl such great kindness, and had let Enid realise how really sincere her friendship was, and would have been, and the girl's silence not only hurt but mystified her just a little.

She had been irresistibly attracted to Miss Sinclair, not only by the girl's prettiness, but by her manner, and by the evidence of a rather unusual and, certainly, very sweet nature.

More than once the Rector had spoken about this girl, and had asked if she had news of Enid. Mrs. Gresham felt that he, like herself, considered it a little strange that Enid should not have sent, at least, a few words.

The more she pondered the matter, the more Mrs.

Gresham wondered what the story was that had been written between her nephew and this girl.

Enid had been frank, in a sense: when she had run away that hot morning so early, she had let Mrs. Gresham understand that she wanted to avoid meeting Mr. Hammond again before she went.

Was it she who had made Desmond unhappy? Where was she?

Then came to Mrs. Gresham suddenly an instinct that her nephew knew something about Enid Sinclair's movements, and in a vague sort of way this troubled her.

Dinner was cheery enough, and Mrs. Gresham talked away briskly; but, later on, when she found herself alone with her nephew just for a moment, she put a question to him abruptly.

"Do you know anything about Miss Sinclair, Desmond? I've wanted so much to have news of her."

She saw his face change and a wave of colour pass over it.

"I am afraid I can't tell you anything about Miss Sinclair," he answered. "If you want to have news of her, Adrian Dawney is the person who can tell you what you want to know."

He bent and kissed her, and walked away without another word; and as Mrs. Gresham went upstairs to her bedroom, she was fully convinced that the real significance of the change in her nephew had its origin in a sorrow, a sorrow with which Enid Sinclair was closely connected.

CHAPTER XIX.

JULIAN had paused awhile before going to any other firm of solicitors. He shrank from the thought of tracking down Enid's movements. It was so ugly to spy upon her! And yet, without professional aid, how was he to get at the knowledge he must have?

His interview with Tenderten left him in a more restless and uncertain frame of mind than before.

He loathed and despised this man, and yet, as he said to himself bitterly, had not Tenderten just as much reason to despise him?

It gave him a certain amount of satisfaction to hear from Mr. Pleydell that his mother was making a great deal of fuss. She had been evicted from his house, but not without considerable trouble; and Mr. Pleydell, acting on his orders, had temporarily closed the establishment.

Julian's most frequent companion in these days was Bill Ketch. Nothing interested and roused him so much as to go down with this humble friend to the works where Ketch's invention was being put to a practical use.

There was, too, a fair amount of correspondence to occupy him, for the business part of this scheme had caught on in America, and promised to work out into very big figures.

Bryant and Lady Ellen drifted together almost inevitably, yet though they were so constantly in one another's society, and had become to all intents and purposes intimate friends, they never seemed really to get into actual acquaintance with one another.

She was sure that he cared for her, though also by

this time, she was sure that there had been some other woman in his life whom he must have loved as well, if not better, than he loved her.

"But that's only fair," she said to herself on one occasion, "because, though I like him, he can never, never come first!"

Lady Ellen was perfectly well aware that people were talking, and were beginning to make up a romance about her and this very rich young man.

Everything she did was of interest to many, and of course Julian was watched carefully, and almost jealously. Nearly every woman, she knew, envied Lady Ellen, but this did not trouble her.

Bill Ketch watched this friendship with a curious touch of anger.

He had never once spoken Enid's name. He was as silent as the grave; but he had not forgotten her, and he could not understand how such a man as Bryant, such a "white man," as he phrased it, could so easily have forgotten this girl whom he had married, and who had certainly adored him. Of course, it was none of his business, but then Ketch owed such a debt of gratitude to Julian Bryant that he wanted to be able to give the man the fullest measures of respect and affection; and somehow or other, the thought of that absent wife, the vision of Enid's delicately pretty face, would come between Ketch and this man, who had been such a great friend to him. He could not help liking Lady Ellen. She was just the type of woman to win his heart; nevertheless, he resented the intimate place she had in Bryant's life; and when, one day, it was very necessary to send some one over to America, and Bryant decided that Ketch should go in his place, Bill Ketch seized eagerly at the idea; for he wanted to get away from what he felt was coming, a marriage between Lady Ellen and Julian Bryant!

CHAPTER XX.

JULIAN BRYANT travelled up to Liverpool with Ketch, to see him off. In view of the fact that it was more than probable that Ketch would run into a good deal of money before very long, Julian had proposed that he should travel with a certain amount of comfort ; but Mr. Ketch disposed of this idea very quickly.

"Not me," he said. "No swagger state-rooms and sitting up stiff and starch like ; besides, we haven't done the trick yet, sir, you know, not complete like, and so we'd best go easy."

Moreover, it appeared that Ketch had a "mate" going out third class, and he preferred to chum with this young fellow.

They parted at the docks and gripped hands firmly.

"Here's luck to you, sir," said Ketch, "the real sort, I mean."

Bryant laughed.

It was strange how every now and then, when he was alone with this rough working man, a sense of humility would come upon him, a disagreeable feeling, which was not easy to break off.

"Thanks, Ketch," he said. "Your good wishes count for a good deal." Then he laughed again. "Though I suppose, in the eyes of the world, I've had more than my share of luck."

"Well, I wish you good, that is what I mean," said Ketch ; "and there is one thing sure, sir : whether this thing comes off, as we hope it will, or whether it dries up and rots, I'll never forget what you've done

for me, never ! You've been the right sort of pal, you have. So, once more, here's luck ! ”

Bryant travelled back to London with a feeling of restlessness upon him. He would miss Bill Ketch. Of course, he could always go to the works ; but it was the man who had drawn him, who had had the power to interest him, to take him right out of himself.

After waiting, he hardly knew why, a certain length of time, Julian had put the matter of finding Enid into the hands of another legal firm. Sometimes, when he thought of Tenderten, his lip would curl, and yet an uneasy feeling would come, too.

He had given the man what he had asked, but he mistrusted him so absolutely that he was prepared at any moment to find that Tenderten had played the traitor, and that Ellen Crooper knew the trick he had played, the secret of his life, the real story of his career.

He had not known, until he began matters, how much this question of following up Enid's movements, of forcing himself, as it were, once again into her life, was going to cost him.

He never doubted that she would fail him. When she was found, and his wishes were made known to her, she would unhesitatingly consent to do all that was required of her. Sometimes the thought would come that perhaps Enid might not be found, that perhaps already the freedom he was scheming to obtain belonged to him, that perhaps— He never let himself quite finish that sentence—he called himself a coward and he did all he could to work up hard and bitter feelings for Enid ; but he never could let himself go through with the supposition that she was dead. The very suggestion was like a physical pain.

The lawyers who were acting for him took the

matter up in the most practical sort of way. There was no question of sentiment, no fear of intrusive questioning. To them it was a very ordinary case, and, when once Mrs. Bryant was found, would be carried out as expeditiously as possible. Money can buy nearly everything, and money would buy Julian Bryant his freedom !

He was now beginning to be tortured with the thought that it was absolutely due to Lady Ellen that she should be informed of the real position of affairs.

The more he saw of her the more her charming, bright, half-boyish companionship cheered and comforted him ; the more dishonourable it had seemed to him that this woman should not know what was passing, and yet he could not bring himself to speak to her.

He dreaded to lose her ! She stood for so much in his life now, and he had the very convincing feeling that he meant so much to her. He never deceived himself. He was almost sure that Ellen Crooper was not in love with him, that something was holding her back. But he did know that she trusted him, that she turned to him as to one who would not fail her, and that, certainly, constituted the only real happiness that Julian Bryant had in his life now !

His mother had gone back to Italy. She had worn herself out in abuse of Mr. Pleydell, and in writing frantic letters of reproach and pleading to her son ; but Julian had been firm. He would have nothing to do with his mother.

Had she been poor, struggling, unhappy, he would have taken all her burdens from her, but she wanted for nothing, and he could not forget that in his hour of greatest need, when he had asked her for help, she had denied him !

He spoke frankly and easily to Lady Ellen about

his mother. She was not wholly in sympathy with him.

One afternoon, as they sat together, she ventured to tell him that she thought that he had been a little cruel.

" You don't understand ! " Julian said. " It is my mother who was cruel. You've only known me since I have had all this money. If you had known me in the days when I was walking the streets for some means of earning daily bread, perhaps you would find it in your heart to forgive me what I have done my mother."

" I wish I had known you in those days ! " Lady Ellen said softly. " It is so nice to be able to do things for any one one likes ; and what can I do for you ? You have everything."

" Not everything," said Julian Bryant, " not everything—yet."

The woman shivered a little, and drew back. It was so often that he spoke like this, and yet he never actually came to the point.

Why did he not speak more definitely ? She wanted him to speak now, she wanted things to be absolutely settled. She wanted to put dreams and fancies and sweetest thoughts all behind her, and to face a new future. She was resolved that she was going to be happy with Julian. There was so much in him that appealed to her. She could be of such help to him. He was overweighted now with his money. He seemed almost helpless at times ; and Lady Ellen had begun to make all sorts of little plans and schemes for the future in which this money of his was to play such a big part, not frivolous schemes or foolish ambitions, but big, real work.

She was growing a little thin and becoming nervous. She did not attempt to disguise from herself that she was convinced, that she was quite sure, that he

intended to ask her to marry him ; but what she did not understand was, why he never did do this.

She laughed a little hurriedly, and said :

“ Perhaps I am thinking of things from your mother’s point of view. I often imagine how I should have felt if I had had a son. I believe I should be a horribly jealous mother ! ”

“ There is no comparison between such a nature as yours and my mother’s nature,” Julian answered.

They changed the conversation abruptly, and he told her all about Ketch’s departure the day before, and of the man’s enthusiasm, and of the wonderful fortune that he really believed was in store for this humbly-born inventor.

“ It sounds like a fairy story,” said Lady Ellen.

“ How lovely it must have been for you to have done something for him.”

“ He was very good to me once,” said Julian.

There was a little pause, and at that moment the door opened and Colonel Dawney was announced.

With a little catch in her voice, almost like a cry, Lady Ellen got up.

“ Adrian ! Oh, you stranger ! Where have you been ? ”

“ I paid a flying visit to Nice,” Colonel Dawney said as he shook hands with her, and then nodded pleasantly to Bryant. “ You know my sister Milly is there, and she has not been well lately, so I ran over to see how she was.”

Lady Ellen’s hands were trembling a little, and there was a nervous, excited thrill in her voice.

“ Please ring the bell, Mr. Bryant,” she said.

“ We’ll have some fresh tea, and perhaps we had better have some light.”

As one well used to his surroundings, Julian Bryant turned on the various lamps and then took his stand

on the hearthrug with his back to the fire ! His attitude seemed to signify possession.

When tea was brought Adrian Dawney looked at him thoughtfully.

What a fine, splendid-looking man he was ! Just the sort of man to take the heart of a young creature like Ellen Crooper.

They chatted together pleasantly, for quite half-an-hour, and then Colonel Dawney got up.

Lady Ellen got up too.

" Oh !—oh ! you're not going, and I—I've such a lot to say to you, Adrian ! If you disappear now, goodness knows when I shall see you again. Can't you—can't we dine together ? "

" With pleasure," said Colonel Dawney ; " as a matter of fact I came to ask you if you would care to dine with some friends of mine this evening, the wife of my Rector is in town. You saw her that day at the farm, you remember. She is staying for a little while with her sister, and I know she would like to meet you."

Lady Ellen clapped her hands. She was quite excited.

" Oh, it sounds lovely ! " Then she turned quite apologetically to Bryant. " You are already engaged, aren't you, this evening ? "

Julian said " Yes," and then prepared to take his leave.

" I'll come with you," said Dawney.

He just paused to impress upon Lady Ellen the time, and tell her that he would be waiting for her at the entrance of the Ritz, and then they went down the stairs, and left the house together, he and Julian.

They walked some little distance in silence, and then as Julian was about to make some casual remark, Colonel Dawney said to him rather abruptly :

"I wonder, Mr. Bryant, if you would give me five minutes' quiet chat."

"Of course," said Julian, though his heart began to beat a little nervously. "I shall be delighted. Will you come to my hotel? I am not in my house for the moment."

"That will do very well," said Dawney, and they walked on briskly.

When they were in Julian's sitting-room, Adrian Dawney put down his hat and stick and unloosened his big coat.

"I hope you won't think me intrusive, Mr. Bryant," he said; "but I have to put a very pertinent question to you. For some little time past the Duchess of Wiltshire, myself, and others connected with Lady Ellen have been rather perplexed how to act. We have been waiting, and it seems to me, we are likely to wait indefinitely, to know what your intentions are. I must tell you," Dawney went on very quickly, "although I am not actually a relation of Lady Ellen's, I have known her all her life, practically, and I—have stood to her very much in the light of a brother, perhaps even of a father. Hence the reason I approach you."

"I won't misunderstand you," said Julian Bryant. He had grown very pale, and had moved to the fireplace, and was standing with one foot on the fender. "You allude to my friendship with Lady Ellen?"

"Yes. What the Duchess and we others are anxious to know is, is your sentiment for Lady Ellen friendship only, or have you other views? You see," Coloney Dawney added, with his charming smile, "she is very young. I don't know what her age is really, but she is one of those sort of women who never grow old, and she needs to be looked after, to have all sorts of care lavished on her."

Bryant looked at the other man for a moment, and then said :

" It is my earnest desire to give Lady Ellen this care."

" Have you spoken to her ? "

He shook his head.

" No."

" Why not, Mr. Bryant ? "

Julian caught his breath very quickly and then said :

" There are reasons why I hesitate."

" If your mind is not sure," Dawney said sternly, " then you must not give the world the reason to suppose otherwise. You must not suffer Lady Ellen's name to be whispered about. You must not expose her to gossip and comment ; in short, Mr. Bryant, if you do not intend to ask Lady Ellen to be your wife, then you must keep away from her altogether."

" I do intend to ask Lady Ellen Crooper to be my wife," Julian Bryant answered now, very quietly. " If I have not done so before, it is because, as I said just now, I have hesitated—but I have been wrong ! I will speak to her to-morrow."

" I think I can guess what her answer will be," said Adrian Dawney, and he stretched out his hand, smiling again ; " and I hope you will both be very happy. I think—you are just the type of man to suit her. I hope you will not harbour any very hard feeling for me because I have spoken to you so openly.

" That would be impossible," said Bryant ; and he gripped Colonel Dawney's hand almost passionately.

He walked with his guest out into the hall, and they parted with a feeling of mutual liking ; but after Adrian Dawney had gone, a sudden chill gripped Julian's heart.

He had pledged himself to speak, and yet he knew that if he did speak he must tell all, and that would mean that Lady Ellen would never consent to be his wife !

CHAPTER XXI.

LADY ELLEN thoroughly enjoyed the dinner. She fell in love with Mrs. Gresham, and she liked Mrs. Hammond too, but she was not at all favourably impressed by Mrs. Hammond's son, who came to fetch his mother and aunt.

"What a surly young man!" she said to Adrian Dawney, as he put her into a cab to take her home. "Was it my idea, or did he mean to be disagreeable to you, Adrian?"

"Well, I rather think you are right, Nell. I really don't know very much about young Hammond; but I have come across him once or twice lately, and now that you mention it, I remember that he always has been rather rude in his manner."

"I don't suppose he counts for very much," said Lady Ellen casually; "but he isn't at all bad-looking, and his mother adores him, doesn't she? But that is only natural."

All the way home, which was not very far, Lady Ellen chatted away as happily as possible, and she

enticed Colonel Dawney to come in just for a moment.

"I have had such a lovely time," she said. "Oh, I do wish, Adrian, you'd ask me out very often."

"I'm such a dull, stupid old frump," Dawney answered, "not a bit of good, for all the gay, light-hearted things you love!"

She answered him very, very quickly.

"I like many, many things besides frivolity. Sometimes, Adrian, I don't believe you understand me one little tiny bit."

He looked at her tenderly. She was very, very pretty to-night, with a flush on her cheeks and a wonderful light in her eyes ; and her slim body moving so gracefully about the room, in a gown of diaphanous black stuff, was most fascinating.

"How did you like Julian Bryant?" she asked him abruptly.

"Very, very much," he answered her at once.

"He is a great friend of mine," Ellen Crooper said, with a curious note in her voice, and this other man answered her :

"Yes, I know, and I think—you are lucky to have such a good friend!"

"Shall I see you again soon?" Lady Ellen asked, as he stretched out his hand in farewell.

"Very, very soon ; and if anything big happens to you, Nell, you'll write and tell me, won't you? Remember, your happiness is something very dear to me."

"My happiness!" Lady Ellen said to herself, as she stood alone. "Oh, Adrian! Adrian!"

She covered her face with her hands and, sitting down, she cried unrestrainedly. There was no one to mark her grief, the maids had gone to bed. She was quite alone ; and this night it seemed to her so surely that it was a wasted gift to lavish love on

Adrian Dawney, and that the finger of fate pointed absolutely to a future shared with Julian Bryant.

Norah Powis was sitting, writing, in her cosy little sitting-room, late next day, when a sharp knock at the door aroused her, and she gave a little exclamation of pleasure as she saw Lady Ellen Crooper come in.

"My dear," she said, "I was just thinking about you, wondering when we were going to meet."

Lady Ellen put on a plaintive expression.

"You never do come and see me," she said. "I believe you forget all about me."

"Silly child," said the other woman. "Take off your furs and sit down. What a wretched afternoon! Fancy coming all this way, Nell, in such dreadful weather."

"Well, I want to see you, dear, very much," Lady Ellen said, as she drew off her coat and furs and sat down in a cosy chair; "and then I wanted to ask you something."

"I hope it is something that I can do," said Miss Powis.

"It isn't difficult," Lady Ellen answered. She seemed subdued and looked pale; though she smiled, her smiles seemed to come with an effort. "Do you remember, once upon a time, you took me off, for a week, to a little seaside place on the East Coast? I can't remember what the name of it was. I wonder if I could go there now? I want to get away—I must get away, Nora."

"It isn't the best weather for the seaside," said Miss Powis, in her quietest way; "but still, you rather enjoy roughing it, and I think it would do you good to get out of London."

She paused a moment, and then she put a hand on

the other woman's shoulders. "What's the matter, Nell, something worrying you?"

"Yes," said Lady Ellen in a stifled sort of way. "I'm not a bit happy, Norah." She changed very swiftly. "But, after all, that is my own fault; I'm so stupid. I can't get into the trick of taking the best that life offers me. I always want something more."

"Well, my dear, that is not peculiar to you only," said Miss Powis brightly. "We all sigh for the unattainable at times, you know."

"It isn't any consolation to know that. Will you give me the address of the little hotel, Norah, and then, tell me, can you come down and stay a week-end with me, or are you piled up with work?"

"I think I could run away for a couple of days," said Miss Powis; "and I should love to. It would be very delightful to be with you and this dull, grey, foggy weather does get on one's nerves."

"Well, your life is full of interests," Lady Ellen went on. "You never have a moment to sit down and think about yourself. It is so dull thinking about one's self. I'm sick to death of me."

"The best thing you can do is to run away," said Miss Powis. "All the cobwebs will disappear. You must be out in the air all the time, never mind the rain or the wind, however bleak it is!"

Lady Ellen laughed a little bit more like her usual cheery self.

"Well, I ought to be pretty hardy. The duke used to keep me out for hours at a time when I was up in Scotland. I used to tell him that I should look like a weather-beaten sailor, but that didn't have much effect."

There was a knock at the door at this moment, and the maid-servant came in with a message.

"If you please, miss, can you possibly see Mrs

Sinclair. She seems very anxious to have a few minutes' conversation with you."

"Mrs. Sinclair! Out in this weather!" exclaimed Miss Powis. "Oh! please let her come up."

"A patient of mine," she exclaimed to Lady Ellen; "and one who has no right to be wandering in this rain. You don't mind her coming in, do you?"

"Good heavens, no!" said Lady Ellen.

Miss Powis went to the top of the stairs to meet her guest.

"My dear," she said. "I'm going to scold you: although you are now almost well, you know you are hardly strong enough to risk this kind of thing. What would Dr. Hughes say?"

Lady Ellen heard a voice say hurriedly, "I've something I want to say to you. I was obliged to come."

"Take off your damp coat," said Miss Powis; "and then come in and sit down. Nell," she added, turning to Lady Ellen, "let me introduce a patient of mine, Mrs. Sinclair."

"How do you do?" said Lady Ellen, and then she gave a little start.

She was standing, face to face, with the girl whom she had met that bygone afternoon on the rough pathway leading to Adrian Dawney's farm! The surprise was so great as to be almost a shock.

On her side Enid drew back visibly. She, too, recognised Lady Ellen. She remembered how much she had admired that photograph in Colonel Dawney's drawing-room.

This encounter with one of his friends troubled her, how or why, she hardly knew, only she was conscious of the trouble.

"You have met?" said Miss Powis.

"Only just met," Lady Ellen said.

She was the first to regain composure. She turned to Enid.

"Colonel Dawney was speaking to me about you not so very long ago. I am very glad to see you again. Miss Sinclair."

"Thank you," said Enid.

She was very, very pale; and she looked changed, still young and still very pretty, but changed!

Ellen Crooper's warm heart went out to her. She had such a delicate, nervous look.

"And you have been ill?" she said. "I'm so sorry; but if you have had Norah to take care of you, then I am sure you have been in good hands."

Enid answered by stretching out her hand suddenly to Miss Powis.

"I shall never be able to repay her," she said in a low voice.

The professional eye of Miss Powis saw at once that she was thrilling with some great excitement. She divined also that this meeting with Lady Ellen was a little unnerving, and she vaguely regretted that the two women should have met.

"I hope your illness has not stopped your singing, Miss Sinclair," Lady Ellen said, as she picked up her furs. She had noticed that the maid had announced Mrs Sinclair, but thought probably that this was a mistake.

Enid, however, quick to recognise difficulties, flushed hotly.

"I shall, I hope, sing later on," she said. "Just now I—I haven't been able to think about it."

"You are not going to run away, Nell, are you?" said Miss Powis.

But Lady Ellen nodded her head.

"Yes, dear, I must go now. Remember it is a fixture you are coming down to me on Saturday. We'll have two lovely days together. I'm just an

idle, purposeless kind of individual, and I really ought not to want change of air, but I am sure you ought to have it ! ”

Enid’s face lit up suddenly.

“ Oh ! do persuade her to go away. She works so hard and never seems to tire, yet I know she must get dreadfully weary sometimes.”

Lady Ellen and Miss Powis chatted together just for a moment, about their arrangements, and then Lady Ellen held out her hand to Enid.

“ Good-bye. I do hope you’ll come and see me later on. Norah will give you my address. I think perhaps I ought to tell you that Colonel Dawney was very anxious that we should meet, and when I come home I hope you will let me see you again.”

Enid said nothing, for words were impossible, and Miss Powis went down to the stairs with Lady Ellen. At the door they kissed.

“ Do you want to know why I am going away and why I am so stupidly wretched ? ” Lady Ellen asked suddenly, pausing on the top step before going to the cab that was waiting. “ Well, oddly enough, Norah, that very pretty patient of yours upstairs is the cause of it all ! ”

She had turned, and ran rapidly away before Miss Powis could speak, but the elder woman made no effort to stop her. As she closed the front door she frowned, however, rather sharply, and then she smiled.

“ Really,” she said to herself, “ I shall have to take this matter in my hands. Nell’s story is easy enough to read, and I ought to be able to get at the truth about Adrian if I only go to work cleverly enough.”

She went upstairs slowly, and as she shut the door Enid got up and faced her.

"I am awfully sorry I came to you, especially just now," she said, "but—you have been so good to me. You seem so strong, I turn to you naturally."

"You are quite right to come. You know I am your friend."

Miss Powis took both her guest's cold, trembling hands and drew her to the fire.

"What has happened?" she asked quietly. "There is nothing wrong with your baby, is there?"

Enid gripped the other woman's hands.

"Oh! no, no, not that—not that," she said passionately. "I couldn't bear that! If that were to happen it would kill me."

Miss Powis drew one of her hands away, and patted Enid on her shoulder.

"Dear child," she said. "You mustn't alarm yourself with imagining things. You happen to have brought into the world one of the healthiest and strongest babies it has ever been my lot to see! I only wish you were half as strong in your way as he is in his. Sit down," she added, "and then take your time. I can wait."

"There is something I have to tell you," Enid said. She would not sit down, but moved about a little restlessly. "My—my husband has found out where I am. Yes—yes, I know," she added a little excitedly, "I know you look surprised because you thought—oh! It hurts me even to say it to myself, what I know you must have thought, you and Colonel Dawney! I suppose it was—it was wrong, even cruel, of me to have let you imagine such a thing, but I had to keep silence. I wanted no one to know the truth about me. Now—now I must let it be known."

Miss Powis answered her very gently.

"My dear," she said. "You cannot possibly guess what either Colonel Dawney or I have thought about you, but—you may be sure that we neither of us have had harsh thoughts; and if you have not confided in us, you are not to blame."

"I never wanted any one to know," Enid answered her, scarcely heeding these kind words, but intent on her thoughts; "but now everything is changed! My husband's lawyers have been to see me this afternoon. I don't know how they found me, but they came, and that is what brought me to you."

"I wonder if I may know a little more?" asked Norah Powis in the same gentle way. "Is it a great trouble to you that you should be found by your husband? Were you very unhappy with him? I'm rather old-fashioned, and I have a great belief that husbands and wives ought to live their lives out together, unless, of course, something very serious, very real, separates them."

"Something very real, something very serious, stands between us," Enid said; but she did not speak steadily, for in her heart there was a responsive echo to what Norah Powis said; and of late, since the birth of her child, the real meaning, the sacredness of the marriage tie, had come to Enid in its fullest significance. And yet, though her heart still yearned for the man she had married—though to her single, beautiful, straightforward mind, this life, apart from Julian, was not only sorrowful but wrong, she saw no way of ending the wrong; in fact, with a woman's swift intuition, she guessed instantly what would be required of her.

"Please forgive me, dear, dear Miss Powis," she said after a little silence, "if I don't tell you everything about myself—the secret is not entirely mine. Perhaps some day—"

She did not finish the speech. Nora Powis answered her gently.

" You can tell me just what you want me to know," she said " How can I help you ? "

" I don't know that you can help me," Enid answered. " I turned to you just because I felt I wanted to be with somebody who I knew would be sympathetic ; and I wanted to ask you if you would tell Colonel Dawney that for the moment I don't think that I shall be able to go down to that little cottage which he so kindly offered to let me have."

" I'll make it all right with Adrian," said Miss Powis. " I haven't been too keen about your going down to the country just yet, you know. It is very bleak at this time of the year, and besides," she added with a smile, " I don't want to lose you. I confess I shall feel quite lonely when you take yourself away."

Enid gave a faint smile in return.

" After all, there is something you can do for me," she said in a low voice. " I don't expect that I shall be able to keep—my affairs all to myself now. I have—I have—a feeling that—Mary Hughes and her husband ought to be informed, as you will be informed, as Colonel Dawney will be informed, of what is going to happen with me, and I know that Mary, who is really fond of me, will think it her duty to protest against certain matters. Will you—"

" Mrs. Hughes is indeed your friend, and very much attached to you," said Miss Powis gently ; " and you owe your life in a great measure to her husband's skill, so you must make allowances for them ; but I will protect you as far as I can, that is the best of being a strong-minded female, one does serve some good purpose ! "

They stood in silence another few minutes, and then Miss Powis said :

"Are you troubled about the child? Will your husband want to interfere with him in any way?"

Enid coloured hotly.

"No; oh, no; I am sure not!" Then she added, "I—I didn't tell the lawyers about him. Why should I?" she asked suddenly and passionately. "He is mine! He is all I have! Julian has so much; he can't take the child from me."

The name of her husband slipped from her unawares; but Miss Powis caught it, and stored it in her memories.

It had a slight, familiar suggestion about it, though she did not know any one of that name herself.

She began talking of Lady Ellen.

"Now you have seen my girl," she said. "I always call Nell 'my girl,' though she isn't a girl any longer; but I am so fond of her, and she is so young, she never seems anything but a child to me."

"She is very beautiful," said Enid in a low voice.

"Yes, I suppose she is very pretty, but one can hardly define Nell's charm. It is not only features, or perfection of colour. It is something in herself. She really is the dearest and kindest creature in the world. I shan't rest till I have seen her happily married. Are you going now? Well, I'll walk back with you. I want to see that bonny little boy. How Mrs. Hughes does love him! I am so sorry the doctor and his wife have no children."

She wrapped Enid up very warmly and chatted with her briskly as they walked through the cold streets; but as she went back to her rooms, Miss Powis looked thoughtful, even grave.

She had grown into the trick of making her life

out of the lives of other people ; but somehow she felt as if she were approaching a matter which would be not only difficult and delicate to handle, but which would mean sorrow for one or another of these two young women from whom she had just parted.

CHAPTER XXII.

IT gave Julian Bryant a shock when he heard from his lawyers that his wife had been traced.

He wanted to ask a dozen questions about her, how she was, how she looked, what she was doing, how she had lived, and, above all, he craved to know whether she had travelled so far away from him that his memory was dim ?

He kept a curb upon himself, however, and took the matter in, apparently, the most casual way.

The clerk who had visited Enid merely informed him that he had had an interview with Mrs. Bryant, and had told her that she would be waited upon within the next two or three days to discuss a matter important to herself.

“ It is just possible,” he said to Bryant, “ that Mrs. Bryant will prefer to have further discussions through the medium of her lawyers. She will inform us of this, I presume ? ”

“ I suppose so,” said Julian ; “ but when do you think of going to see her ? ”

"Well, there is no need to lose time," said the clerk. "I shall probably go to-morrow."

"I am writing instructions to your firm to-night," said Julian.

He went out and walked about restlessly, when he was alone.

His house was still shut up. Lady Ellen was away, and even if she had been in town he would have avoided her. Why he could hardly have told; but the knowledge that he knew where Enid was, that he could see her within the hour, acted upon him very strangely.

He could settle to nothing. He missed Bill Ketch at this moment, more than he could have described.

After lunching at a restaurant, and trying to sit out half an hour at one of the huge music-halls, which are open daily, he decided to go for a long motor spin.

He must get away from London, away from people, away from himself. How he wished it would have been possible for him to have had friendship with Colonel Dawney, real friendship. He knew no man who had attracted him so surely as this kinsman of Lady Ellen. There was everything about Dawney which appealed to Julian.

The mere recollection of this man, and the knowledge of what he was about to do, was sufficient to send a chilling thrill almost of pain through his heart.

When the truth was known, would not Adrian Dawney hold him in contempt?

Somehow he thought far more of Dawney to-day than he did of the woman he was planning to marry; and he little imagined that, while he was spinning away from London, he was being discussed by Adrian Dawney himself.

Miss Powis had lost no time in communicating with Colonel Dawney.

“ Nell came to see me yesterday,” she scribbled ; “ and I am not quite happy about her. Can I have a little chat with you ? Don’t come to me. I’ll come to you. I think I shall enjoy lunching out for a change.”

So the day after Lady Ellen had gone to her self-imposed exile, Miss Powis and Colonel Dawney sat lunching at the very same restaurant to which Lady Ellen had been invited in the summer.

“ I think I shall have to take you in hand, Adrian,” Miss Powis said, after she had gripped hands and greeted her friend and host. “ You are not looking very grand.”

“ This bleak weather tries me a little bit,” Dawney answered, “ and I am never very happy when I am in town.”

“ Why do you stay ? ”

He shrugged his shoulders.

“ I have got a restless fit on. If I go back to the farm, I know I shall have to run back here. Besides, I’ve been having a good bit of pain lately.”

He jerked his head towards his shoulder.

“ Sometimes,” he said, “ I dream that all that never happened, Norah, and that I’m just as I was before the war.”

“ Dreams are vain things,” said Miss Powis calmly, and then she laughed at him. “ Don’t you know, you very foolish thing, that you are infinitely more interesting since the war ? ”

“ That is your way of looking at it ! ”

“ Not mine alone,” answered Miss Powis.

He caught his breath with a sigh.

“ Well, I am a bit of a fool, I suppose ; but I confess—that I’d rather be less interesting and stand being an ordinary man.”

"That you can never be, my dear," Norah Powis said. She led him to talk about other things, and a pleasant half-hour slipped away.

Suddenly Colonel Dawney said :

"You wrote that you are worried about Nell. Why?"

"The child isn't happy, Adrian."

Colonel Dawney's brows contracted.

"She will be happy," he said ; then he added, "He is a fine—fine man—and I believe he is really devoted to her."

"Who are you talking about?"

"The man who wants to marry Nell."

"I didn't know there was such a man. At least," added Miss Powis hurriedly, "I won't go so far as that, but the man I have in my mind is not, I take it, the one you are thinking about."

"I am speaking of Julian Bryant. This rich chap who has come into Nell's life during the last year. I know I am making no mistake, because he has told me himself his one hope is to marry her."

"Oh!" said Miss Powis. "Why did he confide in you?"

Dawney's face was hot with colour for a moment, and then he said :

"Well, the fact is, I also have been a little worried about Nell ; and this fellow has hung about her so much, and the duchess and one or two others have spoken about it, and have been waiting to hear about the engagement, so I thought it my business to tackle him, and ask him his intentions. Somebody must take care of Nell, you know," he added, as if by way of explanation ; "and I'm just the old fogey to do that."

"Yes, you are," said Miss Powis, with a certain amount of emphasis.

He was looking grave ; and suddenly she turned to Dawney.

“ What name did you say—Julian ? ”

“ Yes, Julian Bryant. He came into a lot of old Mrs. Marnock’s money about a year or so ago. Hasn’t Nell talked to you about him ? ”

“ Just casually, she has mentioned him,” said Miss Powis ; “ but you have given me a surprise, Adrian. And you approve of Mr. Bryant ? ”

“ I like him very much,” Dawney said simply. “ I think he is a good chap ; he is not a bit spoilt by money ; he is strong and young, good to look at, just the proper sort of husband for Nell.”

Miss Powis moved a little impatiently.

“ I think Nell ought to exercise a little of her own judgment in the choice of a husband,” she said.

Dawney looked at her with some perplexity. He realised that she was cross, but he had not the least idea why this should be so.

“ Yes, I’ll have some coffee,” said Miss Powis, “ and a cigarette ; perhaps that will steady my nerves.”

“ You, with nerves, Norah ? ”

“ Yes. It sounds queer, doesn’t it ? But I am just an ordinary woman, you know, in spite of my apparent strong-mindedness.”

They sat a little while in the lounge, and then Colonel Dawney walked with Miss Powis to the corner, where she took her omnibus.

She declined a cab.

“ No—no, thank you,” she said. “ I feel safer—more at home—in a bus.” Then she gave him Enid’s news.

“ I’m sorry,” said Colonel Dawney. “ I think she ought to get a change of air ; and I believe I can make that cottage quite comfortable for her.”

“ Well, I want her in my own hands for a little

while longer," said Miss Powis; " and besides, certain business has cropped up which will keep her here, business to do with her husband," she said.

Colonel Dawney gave her a quick look.

"Has she told you all about herself?" he said.

Miss Powis shook her head.

"No; probably she never will. One really doesn't want to know much; that she is unhappy, poor child, is plain enough for us to see; but that she is good and true—and sweet as she looks—is also another very evident fact."

"Yes," said Adrian Dawney warmly. "She is a charming young woman, and I only hope there is not going to be a bother. Has the husband himself appeared upon the scene?"

"Not yet—only lawyers."

"Well, while she has you to look after her, she won't come to much harm, Norah"; and then they shook hands with the grip of old friends and parted.

When she got back, Miss Powis found a little note, signed Enid Sinclair, asking if they could meet that evening. The next day Lady Ellen would be expecting her; so Miss Powis snatched at this opportunity of meeting Enid, and sent a few words saying that she would be round after dinner.

Thanks to the combined efforts of those who had been with her through her illness and her hour of trouble, Enid was installed in a larger and more comfortable room.

She had not been in a condition to know what was happening to her when she had been carried down to this room, and afterwards, when she had learnt how much had been done for her, and in what a charming way, she made no protest, only in her heart she registered a vow that sooner or later she would pay back all that she had cost these people, who were, after all, strangers to her.

She was sitting in a low chair by the fire with her baby in her arms, when Norah Powis came in.

"Oh, how cosy you are here. It is awfully cold out to-night ; and Nell writes that it is very cold at the sea."

Enid greeted her with a smile.

"How good of you to come ! Do forgive me if I don't get up. Baby has been rather difficult. He would not go to sleep to-night, so I have had to sing and rock him a little ; all very bad, I know, but I simply had to get him asleep."

"What a darling he is," said Miss Powis in a whisper, bending over and looking at the little tiny face half hidden in a soft shawl. "Enid, I envy you ! There is nothing I have wanted all my life, so much, as a baby."

"I can't offer to share with you," said Enid, with a good attempt at gaiety.

She covered her baby over very carefully, and still rocked herself to and fro slightly.

"You are going away to-morrow, aren't you ?" she asked.

"Yes ; but not if you want me ; then I won't go."

"Oh, my dear, what a suggestion ! Lady Ellen would never forgive me ; besides, I want you to go. I—you ought to have had a change a long time ago."

"Have you been troubled to-day ?" Miss Powis asked, as she sat down on the other side of the fireplace.

Enid answered "Yes," quietly. "I am going to speak to you as frankly as I can," she said. "It has been proposed to me that I should bring an action for divorce against my husband."

"For what reason—desertion ?" asked Miss Powis quietly.

Enid shook her head.

"No; I deserted him; but it seems that he cannot divorce me; and as he wants his freedom, they have come to me."

"And are you going to consent?"

"Oh, yes. I could not refuse."

"My dear," said Norah Powis, leaning forward and speaking earnestly. "I don't think you quite understand. Whatever you did when you were alone is this matter; now you are not alone. You have one child. I am not asking you questions. I don't want you to tell me anything other than you can tell me, or care to tell me; but my common sense urges me to persuade you to do nothing in a hurry, nothing without due consideration, and without legal counsel."

"I hate lawyers," Enid said suddenly; "besides, my mind is made up. After all, what is the difference? We are apart; divorced or married we should always remain apart. It seems to me it is my duty to give him this complete freedom."

"You are so young! What may seem a duty to you may possibly be the reverse to other people. I repeat, what you did when you were merely a wife is one matter, but now you are a mother as well as a wife. You have to think of your child, of the future of the child. Enid, my dear, you must not do anything without the gravest consideration, make no promises, consent to nothing without advice, for the moment."

"I have already promised. I have agreed to everything."

Miss Powis remained silent, and then she said:

"I am very sorry. Why did you not speak to me; or, if you did not care to speak to me, why not have taken it to Dr. Hughes or to Colonel Dawney? They are men of the world. What kind of man can this husband of yours be—who makes this suggestion to you?"

"Please," said Enid—and there were tears in her eyes—"please—please don't let us speak of him. He belongs to the past. I don't want him to help me. I only want to do what is best for him. That is why I left him. So, do you suppose I am going to shirk now? He wants his complete freedom, and I, it seems, can give this to him. Well—I mean to give it, wise or foolish, I am decided on that." She paused a moment, and then said—"I can always take care of my boy."

Miss Powis sat in silence looking at her; she had such a young look; there was something so pretty, so pathetic, about her that the heart of the older woman yearned over her.

"Just now," she said, when she broke the silence, "I said that I was not going to ask any question; but I find that I want to know a few things. You have made a confession in your last speech; you say you left him because you wanted to do what was best for him. Did you leave your husband with his consent?"

Enid did not answer at once. She got up, very softly, and with careful hands she laid the baby in the white trim bassinet which stood beside her bed. She paused a moment, just rocking the bassinet gently, and then when she saw that the child was sound asleep, she came back and sat down again.

"If you had asked me that at the very beginning," she said, with lips that quivered, "I should have answered 'No.' I should have told you that I acted entirely on my own responsibility, and that my husband did not want me to go; but it would have been a mistake; and I know now—that though I went, apparently, without his sanction, I took a great burden away from him when he realised I had gone!"

"How did this knowledge come to you?" asked Norah Powis. "Have you had any communication from your husband since you left him?"

"No." Enid paused a moment, and then she said, rather hardly, "It was not necessary for him to write, his actions were eloquent enough."

"Were you unhappy together? Did he treat you badly?"

"No—no! Once we were so happy—oh, so wonderfully happy, but then—when trouble came, and we had no money, all the happiness went."

"What was your husband doing? What was his work? Oh! forgive me, dear," Miss Powis said quickly, as she saw Enid cover her face with her hands. "If I did not care for you so much I—I wouldn't broach this matter; but something seems to tell me that you will not only do wrong to yourself and your boy, but that perhaps you are bringing wrong to the man you have married. Will you let him see me, for you?"

Enid started to her feet; with a passionate gesture she brushed the tears from her eyes.

"I tell you I have promised to do what he wants. I—I am not going to break my promise; besides, I feel as he does. I want my freedom. This life is intolerable! I want to feel that I belong to myself, and only myself!" She changed her tone, and she stretched out her hands to Miss Powis. "You must not be hurt with me. I see the goodness, the kindness, the wisdom of all you are trying to urge, but—it is too late to change things now. Let me tell you something else. You know—I have started practising. Mary is so good to me. She has given up her drawing-room for as many hours as I like, and I feel quite happy about baby, because Mary looks after him while I am working. Dr. Hughes is getting me some pupils, and if I go on working as well as I have done these last few days, I shall be able to give a recital in the summer. I know a man who will be only too

glad to bring me forward. He wanted to do it a little while ago, and then I had to refuse."

She was talking nervously, and with an agitation which she tried hard to control, and Miss Powis took the hint and ceased to speak of the more serious matter.

"Well, don't work too hard," she said. "Remember, you are still a little bit of an invalid, in my opinion"; and then she took Enid in her arms and kissed her. "Good night, dear child," she said; "and I'll see you when I come back from the sea. By the way, I gave your message to Colonel Dawney to-day. He is very disappointed that you won't want his little cottage; but perhaps that will come in handy later on."

Enid's eyes were wet as she said "Good bye," and after Miss Powis had gone, she crouched in the chair and let the tears come.

"Oh! Julian, Julian," she said to herself. "I want you—I want you! How am I going to live without you?"

CHAPTER XXIII.

MR. TENDERTEM had not lost sight of his scheme of tracing out Julian Bryant's wife.

He had accepted Julian's money ; but the contemptuous way in which he had been treated, the knowledge that this other man loathed him, was an unpleasant recollection for one so vain as Mr. Tenderten.

He owed Julian a big grudge : the break in his friendship with Lady Ellen Crooper was a serious matter for Mr. Tenderten. All at once he found himself drifting back to his old position.

There were no more pleasant dinners or jaunts to the theatre, no more possibilities of meeting the Duchess of Wiltshire or any other of Lady Ellen's smart friends.

The part that hurt him almost more than any was that she should have so quickly taken her affairs out of his hands and placed them in his partner's ; and for all this, he had Julian Bryant to thank !

It can be well imagined that his feelings for Julian were not amiably disposed.

By mere chance he came in direct contact with the knowledge of Mrs. Bryant's whereabouts.

He was asked out to dinner one night to the house of Miss Manon Laurie's mother. A little while ago Mr. Tenderten would have refused this invitation ; but now he was glad to go anywhere to escape being by himself ; besides, he was by way of being an admirer of Manon Laurie. He knew that she was engaged to be married, but that made no difference

There were one or two other guests, among them a young man of very smart appearance, whom Mr. Tenderten scanned carefully. He knew, in a moment, the sort of person whom it would pay him to cultivate; and Mr. Desmond Hammond was decidedly one of this type.

After dinner, Miss Laurie sang several times, and then she made Mr. Hammond sing; and after, she came and sat down beside Mr. Tenderten.

"Such a pity he has given up singing. He has such a good voice; but his people were too strong for him. He had to leave us and go into the city."

"Oh, has he sung professionally?" asked Mr. Tenderten.

"Yes; he was one of my little tour this last summer. It was awfully jolly, although we didn't make any money; still, we were very happy together, weren't we?" she added, and she addressed another of her mother's guests, who happened to be the baritone who had travelled with the little concert tour.

"Rather!" he answered, and then he put a question to her. "Do you see anything of Miss Sinclair?"

Manon Laurie's face hardened a little.

"No," she answered. "I think Enid behaved very queerly. I gave her work when she didn't know which way to turn, and she left me without saying good-bye or showing any consideration whatever."

Mr. Tenderten pricked up his ears. Sinclair! Enid!

The two names signified a good deal to him.

The baritone lowered his voice.

"Doesn't he know anything?" he asked, with a nod in Mr. Hammond's direction.

"I haven't asked him," said Miss Laurie. "To tell you the truth, I don't care very much. I feel

so hurt with Enid. I think she ought to have treated me a little bit better."

"Well, I thought it was a case," said the baritone, in the same discreet tone. "Anyhow, he was awfully gone on her, wasn't he?"

"Yes; well, she is very pretty, you know," said Miss Laurie; then she added, with a little touch of loyalty, "I have often wondered if Enid disappeared in the way she did do, because of him. You see, she really wasn't Miss Sinclair. There is a husband somewhere."

Mr. Tenderten felt quite excited.

The name of Julian Bryant's wife had been Sinclair. Enid Sinclair! Of course, the girl whom they were discussing was Mrs. Bryant, and no other.

He stayed a little behind the others, and when they were gone, had a few minutes' chat with Miss Laurie.

"I—I have a sort of idea," he said to her, "that I—I can be of great service to Miss Sinclair."

"You!" said Manon Laurie. "What do you know about her?"

Mr. Tenderten smiled a non-committal smile.

"I repeat," he said, "that I can be of great service to her. Can you let me know where she is staying?"

"No, I can't," said Miss Laurie; "as you heard me say, I have had no news of her for a long time. She completely disappeared; sometimes she used to say she would go back to Canada; she came from there as a student to the Academy."

Mr. Tenderten shook hands and went away. He felt quite pleased with himself. It would not be very difficult now to trace out Julian Bryant's wife, and when he had found her—well, he flattered himself he knew a little bit about women, and that he would be able to handle her so that she could be used as a good weapon against the man he hated! He knew

of more than one person who would for a little consideration track out the movements of any one he wished to follow !

A few days hence he promised himself the pleasure of calling upon Mrs. Bryant or Mrs. Sinclair, whichever she called herself, and he registered a resolution to cultivate the friendship of Desmond Hammond on the first opportunity.

* * * *

Enid braced herself up to go about her daily life as calmly as possible ; in fact, after she had recovered from that natural outburst of grief, she took herself sharply to task, telling herself that it was more than mere weakness ; it was contemptible of her to break her heart for a man who now, definitely and openly, was letting her realise that he had no place in his life for her ?

She met her husband's lawyers the following day, and agreed with them that she must be represented also by some legal adviser ; as the matter seemed to be pressing, she resolved to approach Colonel Dawney ; so she sent him down a little note by hand asking him if he could recommend her to a good firm of solicitors. As she had told Miss Powis, she was meeting with a good deal of indignant remonstrance on the part of Mrs. Hughes.

Her old academy friend had got the idea into her head that Enid was being very hardly treated. She had not the same amount of tact as Miss Powis. She did not realise that she was treading on very delicate ground ; but she had been such a staunch friend ; she and her husband had been so wonderfully good, that Enid had to curb her feelings and listen to much which was almost maddening for her to hear at this juncture of affairs. So it was that, when Julian's lawyers informed her that their client had

instructed them to say that a large sum of money would be settled upon her, that she absolutely refused to accept a penny.

She had merely told Dr. and Mrs. Hughes that she was about to bring an action of divorce against her husband ; up to now, she had managed to keep that husband's name a secret ; but, quite inadvertently, she had let them know that she was the wife of a man who had money ; and it was on this very point of money that she and Mrs. Hughes would never have agreed.

There was something more than pride prompting Enid to refuse all that the lawyers proposed. She had a fear that if she took Julian's money he might have the right to take the child away from her, or, at any rate, to have some power over the child.

She had faced the inevitable ; she had realised that the man she loved was practically dead to her. The knowledge rendered her apathetic in a sense, but where the child was concerned, she was only too acutely alive, and she clung to this little creature as to the one thing in life which really was her very own !

Colonel Dawney answered her letter in person.

He was such a comfort to Enid ! He took the matter very quietly, just as if it were the most ordinary occurrence, and he even thanked her for turning to him.

Quite naturally he suggested the name of Pleydell to her as a lawyer, and was surprised when he saw her draw back, almost frightened, at the suggestion.

" No—no ! " said Enid. " I—I want some one—some one else. It would not be possible for me to go to Mr. Pleydell."

Colonel Dawney looked at her thoughtfully ; then wrote down the name of another firm ; and then he talked about the child to whom, at his own

wish, he had stood godfather ; and he talked about her future ; and he found no fault with anything that she arranged ; only he regretted that she had made up her mind to remain in London. Enid gave him rather a wan smile.

"Perhaps, after all, I shall change my mind again," she said. "I don't fancy that I shall be required, and I begin to hate London."

"Well, we must talk it out with Nora," and then Colonel Dawney startled Enid by introducing another subject. "Oddly enough," he said, "I received a letter this morning about you."

The colour faded out of Enid's face.

"About me?" she said nervously.

"Yes. I suppose you know Mr. Hammond, Desmond Hammond?"

Enid's face cleared, and her heart beat a little more evenly.

"Oh! yes," she said. "Mr. Hammond was one of our concert tour. You remember. It was through him we met. Has he written to you?"

"Yes," said Colonel Dawney. "He seems very attached to you, Mrs. Sinclair, and very unhappy about you?"

"I'm sorry," Enid said ; and now she coloured hotly. "May I know what he said to you?"

Colonel Dawney laughed, paused an instant, and then said :

"Well, he seems to have got a very wrong idea into his mind. I don't know how it has come about, but he associates me with the trouble which you have borne so bravely."

"You!" exclaimed Enid. "Oh! how strange!"

"Well, I suppose he has been jumping to conclusions," Adrian Dawney said quietly. "But he evidently knows where you live and what is passing with you ; and he has misunderstood the meaning

of my appearances here from time to time. That is the penalty, my dear child, that you women pay when you take your own lives into your own hands. Now, I am not going to interfere or to preach a sermon, but I would like to point out to you that, young as you are, with all your natural attraction, you will have to contend with many misunderstandings of this nature when you have cut yourself adrift from your natural protector."

Enid's two hands were gripped tightly together.

"Oh! don't make things harder for me," she said; then with an effort she spoke of Desmond Hammond. "I think the best thing will be for me to see Mr. Hammond," she said. "I'll confess to you that he was the reason why I left the tour so hurriedly. I—I was afraid—I didn't want him to be unhappy."

"Well, he is unhappy, that is pretty evident: but he is young, and he'll grow out of it, unless—Well"—Colonel Dawney shrugged his shoulders—"in a little while you will be a free woman, and you ought to have a home and some one to take care of you."

A little cry broke from Enid's lips. Then she said: "Never—never! If—if the man I married doesn't want me, that doesn't make any real difference, because he will always be in my heart what he was. There never could be anybody else!"

Colonel Dawney held out his hands suddenly, and gripped hers.

"Leave me to deal with Mr. Hammond," he said. "I think you have quite enough to think about, and to try you. I shall be able to dismiss all foolish ideas that may have congregated in his mind. Good-bye for to-day, and let me do anything I can for you, won't you? Promise me that." And Enid whispered the words, "Yes, I promise."



Down at the sea, Lady Nell declared that she wanted for nothing more on earth, since she had Norah Powis with her.

Miss Powis laughed at this assurance.

"Oh! my dear," she said. "You flatter me; and I wish it were the truth; but unfortunately it isn't!"

"If I say it is, why should you contradict me?" asked Lady Ellen; then she cuddled the other woman. "Oh, Nora," she said; "let me make pretence to myself. It is so nice supposing things, and I do feel ever so much better. I'm not half so cobwebby as I was."

For a long time she said nothing about Enid Sinclair, but after a while she began to ask questions; and Nora Powis chatted naturally and easily about the patient in whom she had been so interested.

"You must meet her again," she said, "and you must see her baby."

"Oh! I love babies," said Lady Ellen. "Do you know, I should like to go and live in a crèche! Once I was taken to a funny little babies' home in the East End. I walked into a room, Nell, and I looked down at twelve little bundles all staring up at me in the most fascinating way. I nursed every one of them, and I did it very well, too! But do you think Mrs. Sinclair will let me go to her?"

"Why not?" asked Miss Powis.

Lady Ellen shrugged her shoulders.

"I don't know. She sees a lot of Adrian, doesn't she?" she asked abruptly.

"Not a lot; but they meet. Adrian is very much interested in her, and then he is her baby's godfather; one of them."

"Her baby's godfather?" said Lady Ellen. "That makes a very close tie, doesn't it?" and Miss Powis laughed.

"Sometimes, not always." Then it was her turn to ask questions. "Tell me about this Mr. Julian Bryant. From what Adrian says, I gather he is one of your constant admirers."

"I like him," said Lady Ellen; they had just come in from a long walk, and she was sitting crouched up on a big sofa. "First of all, I like him because he reminds me of Adrian; they are awfully alike, Norah, alike in character, too, I think; though of course Adrian is a little older. Mr. Bryant is such a nice man. I am sure you'd like him."

"I want to meet him," said Miss Powis.

"Come and dine. Can you come on Tuesday night?"

"Oh! I can't promise Tuesday," said Miss Powis. "I have had a holiday, you know, and I must go back to work."

"Well, Wednesday—Thursday?"

"Perhaps you had better fix up with Mr. Bryant first."

"Oh," said Lady Ellen carelessly. "He will always come if I invite him."

Miss Powis was folding and refolding her gloves.

"What do you know about him, Nell?" she asked. "Has he any people?"

"He has a mother, who seems to be rather an odious person. You know why he is so interesting, Nora, is that he was working in the hardest way possible when he came into this fortune. What do you think he did? He was driving a taxi."

"Really," said Miss Powis. "That is interesting. I suppose he must have been off his head when he found that he was to be so rich."

"I suppose so," said Lady Ellen; "but do you know, the queerest thing about him is that he doesn't seem to care about his money. And he isn't a bit happy! That is what brought us both together."

"So you sit and talk of sorrows all the time?" asked Miss Powis with a laugh.

"We never talk about our own affairs, but we both feel we need sympathy."

"Are you going to marry this man, Nell?" Lady Ellen said, "Yes"; and then she added, "If he asks me."

"Hasn't he asked you yet?"

She shook her head.

"No; but I know he is going to."

"Still, I think he ought to make up his mind and do it."

"Oh, there is no hurry," said Lady Ellen, and then she added, "Sometimes—I don't know that I shall say, 'Yes.'

"Well, I shall say it for you after this; it seems too good a match for you to miss. Adrian was talking to me about Mr. Bryant the other day, and he had nothing but praise for him."

"Yes; Adrian likes him very much. I wish——" Lady Ellen got up from the sofa and walked to the window, and then stirred the fire vigorously. "I wish," she said, with a queer little laugh, "that Mr. Bryant did not remind me of Adrian. I can't explain it, but I feel it, and somehow it hurts."

Norah Powis smiled to herself in the dusk. The heart of this other woman was so transparent. The marvel to her was that Adrian Dawney did not read what she was reading so clearly.

An impulse prompted her to write that night to Colonel Dawney:

"I find Nell ever so much better for this little change," she wrote; "and we have had a very delightful time together; but I am going back to-morrow, and I believe she will go back with me. I was talking to her to-day about Julian Bryant.

Do you know, I believe you have made a mistake. She likes this man very much indeed, but he is not the man she would choose for her husband. I verily believe I have made a great discovery! There is another man who stands before Julian Bryant, and will always stand. We two who care for her so much, and want to see her happy, we must work so that she does not make a mistake a second time."

"Now," Miss Powis said to herself, when she had addressed this letter and stamped it. "Now I have been and gone and done it, and I wonder what the result will be! I don't imagine," she mused on, after an instant, "that Adrian will misunderstand me; if he does, well, then I shall have to put things just a little more clearly in front of him."

CHAPTER XXIV.

JULIAN BRYANT was absent from town for two or three days: when he came back, he found a budget of correspondence waiting for him. Among this, was one of the usual characteristic letters from Bill Ketch, full of glowing news about the way the Americans were "catching on" to his invention, and several from the lawyers who were attending to his private affairs.

He was asked to make an early appointment, and he telephoned through, and went to Lincoln's Inn an hour or so after his arrival.

He was informed that everything was going forward very well, and then he was further informed that Mrs. Bryant had absolutely refused to accept a penny of the money he had suggested should be settled upon her.

Julian turned very pale. "You must persuade her that this is necessary," he said.

The lawyer shrugged his shoulders.

"Mrs. Bryant's attitude was very firm on this point."

"I suppose I can settle money upon her without her knowledge?" was Julian's next speech, given doggedly.

"Well, you can do so, of course," was the answer ; "but we should scarcely advise you to do this under the circumstances. Doubtless, Mrs. Bryant has very good reasons for acting as she has done, and if you are anxious, as you have told us from the very beginning, that you desire to study her in every way, then I think you can do nothing but fall in with her wishes in this direction."

It was not a pleasant interview, and Julian felt very uncomfortable as he walked away. There had been a little note from Lady Ellen asking him to dine with her that night, but he felt strangely disinclined to go ; in fact when he got back to the hotel, he scribbled a reply declining the invitation, and making the excuse that he had caught cold and would be obliged to stay in his room.

The same restless, miserable feeling took possession of him as that which had driven him away a few days before.

He was really a man without any resources—a lonely man ; and to-night a very unhappy one.

Enid's proud resolution had struck him a blow. How she must hate him !

He dined upstairs in his private sitting-room, and

read through the kind little note of sympathy which Lady Ellen sent him ; but he did not treasure the letter ; indeed, he flung it into the fire ; and as he did so he remembered his interview with Adrian Dawney, and the promise that he had made the other man. The time had come ! He must speak out. All at once he said to himself :

“ I’ll go and see Dawney.”

He had a longing to talk to this other man ; almost he was constrained to make a confession to Dawney of the truth ; but luck was against him. Colonel Dawney was not to be found. He had left town, though he was expected back the following day.

It was a cold night, the streets were bleak and unfriendly ; but Julian turned from the thought of his luxurious hotel with a shudder. He could hardly have defined his feelings, but he knew that he was miserable !

Suddenly he found himself walking in the direction of that part where he knew Enid lived. Why he went there, what force impelled him to go, he did not seek to analyse ; he only knew that he must be near her to-night.

The thought of her was like a magnet drawing him even against his will. It was some time before he found the street, and his heart was beating wildly when he came upon the number and realised that he actually was standing on the threshold of the place his wife called her home.

A sense of shame fell upon him that was almost like a mortal agony. He actually moved towards the bell, and then, when his hand went to ring the bell, he restrained himself.

He had no right to approach her—no right to insult her—by such an intrusion.

Crossing the street, he stood and looked up at the house, eagerly scanning the windows. There were

lights in several of the rooms. He could not possibly know which one Enid occupied ; but in a vague sort of way it comforted him to see these lights, and he walked the whole way back again, thankful that when at last he reached his home he was thoroughly tired out, and conscious thought was mercifully impossible.

The next day he was really very unwell, and Stephens, who came down daily from his house to attend upon him, took upon himself to call in the doctor.

Mr. Bryant was ordered to remain in bed, and Stephens was instructed to say that it was a slight attack of influenza.

Lady Ellen, when she was informed of this, sent round some flowers with her card. She was sorry that Julian was ill, but otherwise she felt almost glad, because she had a strange disinclination to meet him for the immediate moment.

Somehow, she felt that their pleasant acquaintance-ship would be brought to an end ; that the question that she had been expecting would be put to her, and she would have to find an answer.

Lady Ellen hardly realised how much that sojourn at the seaside with Norah Powis had undermined her determination to accept Julian Bryant.

She had gone away from London on purpose to escape from her thoughts about Adrian Downey, and Norah had done nothing but talk about him.

She had presented the man in a new light. She had let Lady Ellen see that, though he was so very calm and wise and strong, and always so cheerful, that behind all this there lurked the suffering man who felt himself no longer the physical equal of his fellow-men.

“Adrian made me quite unhappy,” Norah Powis

had said on one occasion. "He was so pathetic about himself."

Lady Ellen found herself wishing that she could dismiss this subject from her mind ; but it was impossible !

She thought she had understood and known Adrian Dawney most thoroughly ; but now he appeared to her in a new way.

She wanted to soothe him, to take all unhappiness out of his thoughts, to make him feel how wonderful he was ; how much higher and better and greater than any other man. So, very gradually, she came to the conclusion that, though it might never be possible for her to take such a definite place in Adrian Dawney's life, yet to bind herself to another man, to try and make new interests, to build up another existence in which Adrian had no part except as a friend, was something she could never do ; and all at once she resolved on telling Dawney himself something of the truth, and on asking him to help her.

"Perhaps if he could let Mr. Bryant understand that I am a changeable, erratic, tiresome sort of person, he might prevent things coming to a crisis."

She called at Colonel Dawney's hotel, and found that he was expected back that evening ; so she wrote him a little letter, and said that she would be glad if he would come and see her on the following afternoon ; and late that same night she got a letter from Julian Bryant, who wrote that he was really all right again, and that he wanted her to be so kind as to let him come and see her on the following day after lunch.

"I have something to tell you," he said ; "something that you ought to have known a long time ago."

Lady Ellen's first instinct was to put off either one or the other of the men ; then she decided to do nothing of the kind ; instead, she wrote fixing the

hour for Julian Bryant to call, which would be the same time at which she expected Colonel Dawney.

It can be safely said that Lady Ellen scarcely closed her eyes that night, and she looked quite pale and tired when the next day came.

She was also rather subdued in manner, and her maids were a little troubled about her.

In the middle of the morning she sat down and wrote a letter to Colonel Dawney :

"You are coming here this afternoon, Adrian dear," she wrote ; "and when you come I want you to do me a great service.

"I think you have understood that I have been half inclined to make a new future for myself. I won't pretend with you. I mean that I know you have understood that some one has come into my life, and that there is the possibility of my being asked by Mr. Bryant to marry him. I don't know if I have been very wrong, or if I have given him too much encouragement ; the fact is, Adrian dear, now that I feel things are coming to a point I—I don't want to make any change. When you come here this afternoon, you will meet Mr. Bryant. Will you let him understand—that though I like him very, very much better, indeed, than any other stranger I have ever met, I cannot marry him ! Don't ask me to give my reasons. I hardly know them myself, I only know that what I have imagined would bring me happiness, would bring me just the other thing ! You know you told me that, if any big event shaped in my life, I was to let you know at once. Well, I am taking you at your word, and I ask you, just as if you were my brother, to smooth away any difficulties there may be for me in connection with this man "

She signed this simply "Nell," and she sent it round by hand to the hotel.

She lunched out with some friends, and came back trembling with nervousness.

Her maid informed her that Colonel Dawney was in the drawing-room ; but she passed the door, and went on up to her own room.

The fact that he was there was sufficient answer to her that he meant to do what she had asked.

In a little while the message was brought to her that Mr. Bryant had arrived.

"Please say that I will be down very soon."

As he entered the drawing-room, Julian Bryant gave a little start, then he moved forward rapidly and stretched out his hand.

"I have been trying to find you all this morning," he said. "I am glad you are here."

The maid appeared at the doorway and gave Lady Ellen's message.

"Her ladyship will be down very soon," she said.

The door was closed and the two men were alone.

Julian stood a moment uncertainly, and then he looked into Dawney's eyes.

"A little while ago," he said, "you put a plain question to me ; and I told you that the reason why I had remained silent was because there were reasons which made me hesitate. Colonel Dawney, I have come here this afternoon to tell those reasons to Lady Ellen. I have come here for another purpose, to ask her to forgive me if she can ; and not to hate me too much."

"Suppose you speak out to me," said Dawney, in his quiet way.

"I—I cannot ask Lady Ellen to marry me," said Bryant almost bluntly, "because—I am married already."

Colonel Dawney's brows contracted sharply. He

looked at the speaker very keenly, so keenly that Julian winced.

“ I did not mean to tell her till I was free,” he said. “ I—I—the proceedings for a divorce are now being arranged. It has been difficult for these proceedings to be started earlier because I had no knowledge of my wife’s whereabouts; moreover, it has to be a constructed case, and this can only be done with her consent. I think I know what you are going to say to me, Colonel Dawney; you are going to call me some ugly names. Well, I shall have to stand that, because I know that I deserve them! There are some extenuating circumstances which perhaps later on you will listen to; now all that has to be done is to tell Lady Ellen the truth, to let her know—that I wronged her, in supposing that she would have married me—when—I got my freedom. That is not all,” said Julian, turning rather abruptly and facing the other man, “ something came to me—in the last twenty-four hours—a truth which I have done my best to kill and forget—it is not only my position which stands between me and Lady Ellen—it is the fact that though I would give her devotion, homage, she would never be the woman I love! ”

He broke off suddenly, and then he said a little hoarsely :

“ The thing that is hurting me as much as anything else is that I may be the unworthy cause of making Lady Ellen unhappy.”

“ Before you go any further, Mr. Bryant,” Colonel Dawney said gravely, “ I am going to give you a letter to read. It was written to me in confidence, but it will convey to you, far better than I can, the truth of Lady Ellen’s feelings.”

He turned round and faced the fire while Julian eagerly read the few hurried, simple words which Lady Ellen had written that morning.

When he had finished, he sat down and covered his face with his hands.

"Here at least," he said, not very steadily, "I am granted some peace of mind. I have been very troubled about her. I was afraid—" He broke off and got up restlessly. "You see, it wasn't mere vanity on my part; you see, we both like one another, something draws us together, and still something holds us apart. I think I had better go. It will not be necessary for me to see Lady Ellen. Tell her just what you like."

He turned to go to the door, but Colonel Dawney stopped him.

"Wait—wait!" he said. "I want to ask you just one or two questions. I tumbled to the fact a long time ago that you were not a happy man. At first I attributed this to the great change in your circumstances, for no one knows better than I do that money, big money, does not always bring happiness; but I have been watching you and studying you lately, Mr. Bryant, and I convinced myself a little while ago that you were a man living with a shadow always. Now, all this is explained to me. You are going away from here, and probably you imagine that you will never be permitted to come here again as a friend. I hope you will dismiss that idea. I think Nell would fret very much indeed if she thought—that your friendship was to end. Will you let me know—what you are going to do? We have been speaking very intimately together, and you have, as it were, bared your heart to me. I am not going to say that I approve of the secrecy you have maintained all this time; perhaps the extenuating circumstances of which you have spoken will make this pardonable. I want to see you again. I should like to ask you to let me be of any service to you that I can."

"Thanks," Julian Bryant stretched out his

hand, and Colonel Dawney took it in a tight grip. "Thanks," Julian said again a second time, and then he went away.

Two or three minutes after he had gone, the door opened very slowly, and Lady Ellen peeped in.

"Oh!" she said. "You are there, Adrian. I thought I heard you both go."

She had put on a white tea gown, a very pretty, dainty gown; and as she came almost timidly forward she looked the girl Adrian Dawney always called her.

"Was it very—very difficult?" she asked.

He smiled.

"Come and sit down; and don't fret your little heart out in the least. Perhaps I'm going to hurt your vanity, Nell; but the fact is that just as you made the discovery that you could not marry Mr. Bryant, so Mr. Bryant realises that he could not marry you."

Lady Ellen sat bolt upright and looked at the tall figure standing on the hearthrug.

"Adrian!" she said. "Really and truly? But how funny! My vanity isn't a bit hurt, but I am curious. Did he tell you why? Can I know the reason?"

"It is a very simple reason," said Colonel Dawney. "He has a wife already. A wife whom, I pretty shrewdly guess, is very dear to him, although they are at this very moment trying to get separated from one another."

"A wife!" said Lady Ellen. Then she coloured hotly, and for one of the few times in her life she looked almost cold and hard. "But—how could he come into our lives as he did, pretending to be a bachelor, letting everybody imagine—oh! it wasn't—it wasn't right! I never should have imagined that Mr. Bryant would have done such a thing as that."

"He tells me that there are extenuating circumstances, and I am going to believe him," said Adrian, "We must never judge one another unless we have good ground for our judgment. The great thing to realise, and to rejoice over, is that you are not going to be made unhappy about this."

"I am very surprised," said Lady Ellen; "and yet," she added, in the same breath, "I don't know, I have always felt that there was something, somebody who influenced him. I expect why he turned to me, and liked me, was because he was unhappy, and because he knew that I was in the same boat."

"Why are you unhappy?" asked Adrian Dawney, "Oh, I know—I know!" he added; "there were lots in the past—to make you wretched, but the past is over and done with, Nell; and you are so young, and you have so much. Why should you be unhappy?"

"Because I can't get what I want, I suppose," said Lady Ellen, a little recklessly.

The man looked down on her, paused an instant, and then he said:

"Of course—I understand why you drew back from the thought of marrying Bryant. It is because there is another man in your life. Nell, won't you confide in me? Won't you tell me something about this other man? In the letter you wrote me this morning, you said you look upon me as your brother. You asked me to act for you as a brother, I love you very dearly, and I want to do all in my power to help you, to advise you."

Lady Ellen got up and snapped her fingers in his face.

"I don't want your advice," she said; "and there isn't another man, at least," she amended, "there is; but you can't do anything with him."

"Why not?" asked Colonel Dawney a little hurriedly.

There was a nervous thrill running through him.
"Why not—Nell?"

• She stood in front of him, very pale, and she tried to laugh.

"Because—because he is the stupidest—blindest—dearest creature in all the world." Then she covered her face with her hands. "Oh, Adrian," she said. "Don't you understand?"

He stood very still, and then he said:

"Nell—" The word was a whisper, but it was full of amazement, and of something else, an exquisite tenderness which held a confession.

He took the two small trembling hands from her face and he held them in his one strong one. Then he drew her nearer and nearer till her head was resting on his breast.

"It can't be true, Nell," he said. "Oh, my dear, it can't be true."

She released herself a little from his hold, and stood looking up at him flushing and paling, with tears in her eyes.

"But it is true; it has always been true. Oh! how I have despaired of letting you know. I have done my best, Adrian. I am sure nobody could have accused me of not having tried to make you see. Why at times, I have felt quite ashamed because I have flung myself at your head so openly; and you have never seen me coming."

"That was because I have been blind," the man answered her; "blind and stupid and all the time—I have been eating out my heart for you."

"Now," said Lady Ellen, in her bright, bird-like way, "now that can't be true."

"It is absolutely true!"

• "Then why have you never let me know?"

Before he could speak, she had stood on tiptoe and put her hand on his lip.

"No—no!" she said hurriedly. "Don't tell me. I—I understand."

She bent forward and kissed the empty sleeve as she spoke, and then the tears came.

"Oh! I am too happy," she said; "much too happy," she repeated, brokenly.

The man, who loved her, bent over her and kissed away her tears.

CHAPTER XXV.

FROM Lady Ellen's house Julian went straight to the lawyers in Lincoln's Inn. He threw a bombshell into their midst.

"I—I want everything to be stopped," he said. "I shall put myself into communication with Mrs. Bryant. This thing cannot go on. Let me have your costs as soon as possible. Charge what you like," he added impatiently; "that doesn't matter."

He went away hurriedly, careless of what was being thought or said about him, and he went direct to his house.

There he gave Stephens orders to open certain of the rooms and to fetch his things away from the hotel.

"I may be going abroad for a long time," he said; "but I shall stay here for the next two or three days."

When he was alone, he sat down and wrote a long

letter to Mr. Pleydell, in which he informed the lawyer that he had quite abruptly changed his arrangements.

"Of course," he wrote, "I don't know what my wife may choose to do ; but, as far as I am concerned, I would like her to understand that I have no desire for my freedom. I can't give you any explanation as to how this has come about. I only want you to accept this as a fact. There is another fact that you will have to accept, and that is that if my wife will only come back to me, I will gladly give up all that I now possess. I don't suppose she will do this. I don't suppose she will have anything to say to me ; but I am going to her, and I am going to try and get her back. Once we are together, I suppose you will know just exactly how to act. Presumably this money and all this property which I now hold, will go to those relations who have always looked upon me as a usurper and an adventurer."

He gave orders that this letter should be sent by hand, and then he walked through the house, stocked with such beautiful things and still so empty and so cold, with a feeling of excitement upon him like a schoolboy has when the holidays are in view.

It was dusk when he left the house and started to walk to that unfashionable part where Enid lived. He sent her no warning. He was afraid to be refused.

The way was long, and his indisposition of the day before had left him less strong than usual. But he would not drive. From this hour he started his life of abnegation. He would say good-bye to all luxury, and all those things which had tempted him and of which he had grown so tired. He only remembered that Enid was at the end of the journey, Enid, who had triumphed over all. He only realised that there could be nothing for him in life if his wife refused to come back to him.

As he entered the street and walked towards the house where she lived, some one came in the opposite direction and on the doorstep they met. It was Enid herself !

She gave a little gasp and half staggered as she recognised him ; then she mastered herself.

" Why—why have you come here ? " she asked. " Is there something more you want me to do ? "

He noticed how thin she had grown ; but he saw too, how sweet she was, how much more lovely even than her memory !

He half stretched out his hand to her, and then let it fall to his side.

" There is something I have to say to you," he said. " Will you let me come in ? "

" I have only one room," Enid answered. " It is on the third floor. The stairs are very steep."

She put the key into the door and opened it.

" If you think it necessary that you must speak to me," she said, " please follow."

He obeyed her without a word, and then walked in silence after her up the stairs.

At the door of her room, Enid turned—

" One minute, please," she said.

She left him standing on the landing, and went into the room, closing the door after her. Her breath was coming almost painfully from her lips. She was dreadfully agitated. There was a cold perspiration on her brow. She wondered vaguely if she would have strength to go through an interview with him.

A girl was sitting beside the bassinet. She got up as she saw her mistress.

" He is sleeping beautifully," she said. " Hasn't moved for an hour."

" I have to speak to some one on business, Bessie. You can come back, when I ring."

The girl went away, looking half curiously at

Julian as she passed out ; and then Enid opened the door.

“ Come in, please,” she said.

She had tossed off her fur cap and had slipped out of her shabby coat ; as he came into the room the man pressed one hand to his eyes. He felt so ashamed to look at her.

“ Now tell me what you have to say,” said Enid.

He let his hand fall, but his eyes were closed still, and he leaned half unconsciously against the door.

“ I want you to come back to me,” he said ; and Enid answered him with passion :

“ You are mad ! You have come here to insult me, to hurt me, and to make my life harder than it is ” ; and he answered her hoarsely :

“ I want you to come back. I have been mad ; but now I am sane. I love you—I love you—I can’t live without you ! ”

Before she had realised what he was doing, he had fallen on his knees, and he had caught her hand in both of his.

“ Enid, for God’s sake,” he said, “ don’t send me away.”

She was trembling in every limb. There was a burning pain in her throat, and her eyes were blinded with tears.

“ You have been too long in coming,” she said. “ I don’t believe in your love ! There is something behind this, some trick, something—which means—great things to you—and so you play your part.”

Julian Bryant got up and stood looking at her.

“ As God is above us,” he said, “ I am telling you the truth. I want nothing but you—you—and work. Everything is hideous to me—without you.”

Enid looked at him and then looked away. There was a slight movement in the little cot ; instinctively

the mother in her responded to that. She moved across the room and stood beside the child.

"Please don't speak too loudly," she said.

Julian stared at her; then a great cry broke from his lips. He took two strides and swept the white curtain on one side.

"Oh! my God!" he said. "There is a child, and I never knew! A child—my child! Our child; and you have been in want, whilst I—"

He could not finish his speech, but staggered to the chair close by, and falling into it, he burst into tears.

Enid stood with trembling lips; then she knelt beside him.

"Don't!" she said. "Oh, don't, Julian. You break my heart."

He caught her to him and kissed her.

"Why did you go away?" he said. "Why did you leave me? It was cruel."

"I went because I loved you, because I knew that you were having a terrible fight. I wanted you to have money and ease of mind. I knew that you would never get them through me or with me."

"It was cruel!" he repeated; but he kissed her with passion, and he held her so tightly that she could hardly breathe. "But I have come back," he cried exultantly. "You are not going to drive me away. You are not going to leave me again. Enid, I have said good-bye to the money, and all that money means. You are all I want—and my boy. Oh, dearest, why did you not let me know what you have suffered. I see it in your face. You have grown so thin. You are so beautiful, but you are so thin—you have had so much sorrow. Enid, you are not going to send me away."

"Oh, we mustn't decide anything in a hurry," Enid said brokenly. "Think—think how difficult

it will be for you, much worse now than in the old days, because you have had so much!"

"Don't let us think about the money," he answered her, "only ourselves, we two, we three. There is going to be money in another direction. I'll tell you all about that later."

He was thinking of Bill Ketch and his invention.

"Now, all I want to do, is to hold you in my arms, to kiss you, to hear you say, 'Julian, I forgive you. I am glad to have you back.'"

"How can I say that?" Enid whispered, "if I know that all my sacrifice is in vain; that I rob you of everything. Have you forgotten what we suffered together, when you tried to get work?"

"I am not afraid of that kind of suffering," Julian answered "What frightens me, is loneliness, heartache, remorse. Do you think I have had one really happy hour since you left me? Do you know why I did not find you—it was because I was so ill that I nearly died."

Enid gave a little cry, and held him more closely to her.

"Yes, I was very ill, so ill that I did not know anything that was happening, and when I came back to consciousness it was to find that many weeks had gone, that you had disappeared, and that I was a rich man! It was not of my own free will that I took that money, Enid. I did not want it—I fought against it for you, to give it to you—yes, but to take it for myself, no; and you must have thought such hard things of me—you must have said to yourself as time went by, 'How soon he has forgotten.' Oh, my wife! It was a great mistake. I know that you did it from the best, the sweetest, and the purest of reasons, but it was a great mistake. We have lost a year of our lives together. We can never put

back that year ; but," he added, with a ring in his voice which spoke of strength and courage, " we are going to have many other years—we three, Enid. God bless you ! Stretch out your arms and take me back."

Slowly she obeyed him, and when they were close to one another, he said :

" Now tell me that you love me, love me just as you used to love—me—and forgive me."

" I love you," said Enid. " I love you better than I used to. There is no question of forgiveness, because I—love you ! "

CHAPTER XXVI.

TWO days after that momentous meeting in Lady Ellen's house, between Adrian Dawney and Julian Bryant, Lady Ellen had a visit from Mr. Tenderten. He had written to her earlier in the day to ask her if she would be so good as to see him.

At first, she had decided that this would be impossible ; but on discussing the matter with Dawney, who was lunching with her, they agreed that she had better receive Mr. Tenderten and hear what he had to say.

" It is something about Bryant, you may be sure,"

Colonel Dawney said. "I'll come in whilst he is there."

Lady Ellen received Mr. Tenderten very charmingly and he felt as if he had drifted back into the delightful old times as she poured him out a cup of tea and made him feel so much at home.

"You haven't been to see me for a long time," she said ; and Mr. Tenderten smiled a little sourly.

"I thought you had forgotten me, Lady Ellen."

"Oh, no. I never forget. You see, I remember that you take two lumps of sugar."

"Well, you never write to me," said Mr. Tenderten, "and you have been so unkind ; you have gone to Mr. Pleydell with your business instead of me."

"Well, the fact is," said Lady Ellen, "I thought that I was treating Mr. Pleydell very badly. You see, he has known me such a long time, and I felt I was hurting his feelings."

Mr. Tenderten drank his cup of tea and then got up and stood by the fire.

"I—I asked you to see me to-day, Lady Ellen, because I have a serious matter to discuss with you."

"Really ?" said Lady Ellen.

She offered him her cigarette case ; but he noticed that she did not smoke herself.

"Yes, it concerns Mr. Bryant, Mr. Julian Bryant."

"Anything—that concerns Mr. Bryant is of great interest to me," said Lady Ellen ; "and," she added, "I am expecting him here this afternoon."

"He has no business to come here," said Mr. Tenderten angrily. "He is an impostor ! You have been shamefully deceived, Lady Ellen ! Mr. Bryant is a married man !"

Lady Ellen laughed.

"Oh ! yes, I know he is ; and what is more, I know his wife. Both Mr. and Mrs. Bryant are coming here this afternoon."

Mr. Tenderten stared at her as though he doubted his own ears.

"Coming here this afternoon -Mrs. Bryant?" he said.

"Yes." Lady Ellen nestled herself on the many cushions of her couch. "I see you are not in the secret. There has been a general alarm up all round. Mr. Bryant came here and told Colonel Dawney. By the way, Mr. Tenderten, you haven't congratulated me. I am going to be married to Colonel Dawney in a month's time. Well," chattered on Lady Ellen, noticing with some amusement the expression on Mr. Tenderten's face, "Mr. Bryant was going to have a separation from his wife, but happily they both changed their minds, and now—they are together again; and I don't think one could meet two happier people!"

Mr. Tenderten could not speak for a moment, and then he said, with all bitterness:

"All very clever"; and then very deliberately he looked at Lady Ellen and said:

"I congratulate you. You have had a narrow escape!"

Lady Ellen's colour rose; but at that moment the door opened, and Adrian Dawney came in.

"Just in time, Adrian. Mr. Tenderten is saying such nice things to me."

Tenderten suddenly felt very uncomfortable. To indulge in temper and sneer when he was alone with Lady Ellen was one thing, but Colonel Dawney was a big man; and Mr. Tenderten was never quite at ease in his presence.

Colonel Dawney did not shake hands with him, merely nodded.

"How do you do?" he said. "Very cold, isn't it, to-day?"

Mr. Tenderten agreed that it was very cold, though

he himself felt very hot ; and murmuring he hardly knew what, he made his adieu and took himself off.

" What a little spiteful toad ! " said Lady Ellen. " You were right, he came here to warn me against Mr. Bryant."

" Although he was well paid to hold his tongue. I have just come from Pleydell," Colonel Dawney added. " We have been discussing the position with regard to Bryant and his money. Of course there isn't a shadow of doubt the bequest stands. As a matter of fact," laughed Colonel Dawney, " I'm not a lawyer ; but I am very much surprised that the peculiar stipulation which the late Mrs. Marnock made was ever allowed to work so disastrously in the lives of those two young people. It appears, however, that the wording of the bequest was very cleverly done."

" Then if they come together again," said Lady Ellen anxiously, " they can't have the money ? "

" Yes, they can," said Colonel Dawney, " because you see they fulfilled the stipulation that they were to be separated, and they have been separated ; but nothing was said ever about their coming together again. I dare say there will be some attempt on the part of those relatives who, according to Mr. Pleydell and Bryant, were so angry when they heard of all this money going to him, but—I don't think myself—it can be taken away from them."

" They are coming here, directly," said Lady Ellen. " I am looking forward so much to seeing her ; just to think how wretched I was because I imagined—"

She did not finish her sentence, because Adrian Dawney stooped and kissed her.

" Stupid little child," he said, " but very dear ! "

Both Julian Bryant and his wife quietly renounced all further connection with Mrs. Marnock's money.

"We shall have more than enough to live upon," Julian explained when Mr. Pleydell expostulated with him. "Money makes money, you know; and my old comrade, Ketch, is busy building up quite a decent little fortune, which we shall share. I don't want that grand house or all those wonderful things in it. I just want a little home—big enough to hold my wife, my son, and myself. We are both going to work," Julian added. "I see now how wrong I was. Enid is an artist. She has a right to have her own place in the world. She wants to work, and I shall let her work."

As the days went past, however, Colonel Dawney's supposition was proved to be correct. Having obtained possession of Mrs. Marnock's bequest by the fulfilment of her strange stipulation, it appeared that there was nothing to prevent Julian and his wife from coming together again whilst he still remained master of all Mrs. Marnock had left him.

On the point of not accepting the situation, F. M. and her husband were absolutely in sympathy. So it fell to Mr. Pleydell's lot to find out all those relatives of Rachel Marnock and her husband, to whom money was not only welcome but a necessity, and among all these Julian Bryant proceeded to distribute, in yearly incomes, the money which a dead woman's caprice had bestowed upon him.

The house was closed, the works of art in it were also distributed among the many, who only too eagerly responded to Mr. Bryant's quixotic generosity.

Mr. Tenderten heard of these proceedings with a sour smile. His bitterness towards Julian had not abated. It was all the greater because he did not see his way clear now to work any evil in this other man's life.

The very night that Julian had found his wife and they had been re-united, Mr. Tenderten had discovered Enid's whereabouts, and had promised himself the pleasure of waiting upon her and of moulding her to the fulfilment of his wishes.

He made the mistake of imagining that he would have a very easy task in inflaming Bryant's wife against him; but this delight was rudely snatched from him. It may be truthfully said that the news which Lady Ellen imparted to him so casually and pleasantly struck Mr. Tenderten a great blow!

He felt defrauded. It was true that he had obtained a big sum of money from Bryant, but that was to have been only a beginning. Now the money he had intended to share was being scattered in this mad fashion, and all his schemes for social success (for Mr. Tenderten was shrewd enough to know that money and money alone would get him where he wanted to be), fell to the ground.

It was a poor consolation to sneer at Bryant and call him a fool. His chance had gone, and was never likely to come back again.

Lady Ellen went house-hunting with Enid. They were drawn together irresistibly.

Miss Powis declared that she was jealous; but she encouraged the open friendship in every possible way.

No one who had helped Enid in her loneliness and trouble would be forgotten.

The first visit she and Julian paid was to the Greshams. Then they stayed a day or two with Colonel Dawney in his delightful old farmhouse, and Lady Ellen was a fellow-guest.

The Bryants' choice of a home lay in Hamps-
stead, so that they should be near Dr. and Mrs.
Hughes.

The only two who held aloof were Sybil Jackson, who strongly disapproved of what she called Enid's weakness, and Desmond Hammond.

Very gently and very delicately, Enid had spoken of this young man to Julian.

"I should so like to see him sometimes," she said wistfully. "But I suppose it is not quite possible."

Julian made a wry face.

"No, not quite possible," he said; then he added, "but, after all, I can't blame him; and if he was good to you, dearest, that makes everything right!"

They found a quaint little house in Hampstead, not far from the Heath.

Lady Ellen was very enchanted with it, and she declared that she would leave Mayfair and take up her abode with them.

She was very happy these days. Her wedding was to be a very quiet affair.

The Duchess of Wiltshire wanted it otherwise, but both Dawney and Lady Ellen refused to have any fuss.

"I am going to be a farmer's wife," the bride-elect declared, "and I ought really to go to church in a churn."

The farm, it appeared, however, would only be kept for holiday, for Colonel Dawney was appointed to a position at the War Office, and this entailed his living in town.

"Of course, I am very glad Nell is going to marry Adrian; but they really will be terribly poor," the duchess said to her husband.

He laughed with a twinkle in his eye.

"You always had a hankering after Bryant," he said; "and to think he had a wife all the time--and such a pretty one too!"

"I can't quite forgive Mr. Bryan," the duchess said; but, after all, he had passed out of her

immediate circle. With the Dawneys there would always be closest, dearest friendship, but the big world of wealth, of amusement, and fashion had no claim on them, no lure for them. They were together again, in sunshine and in shadow, in gladness and in sorrow; they walked hand in-hand, content and happy in their mutual trust and devotion.

THE END.

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